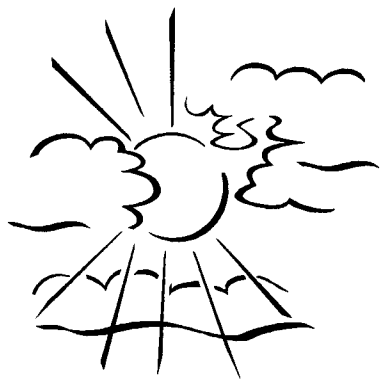


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Monday, December 19, 2005

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Shaffer touts first welfare reform in 10 years

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News

Friday, December 16, 2005 10:40 AM EST

CASSOPOLIS - Michigan has 9,000 people who have been on welfare rolls longer than 60 months, compared to 500 for Ohio, Illinois and Indiana combined.

Those three states cut benefits off after 48 months, state Rep. Rick Shaffer informed the Cass County Board of Commissioners Thursday.

Shaffer, R-Three Rivers, said Thursday that was the "premise" behind "break-the-cycle" welfare reform which involved himself as one of four House members and four senators.

Eight pieces of legislation on Gov. Jennifer Granholm's desk aim to "offer a hand up instead of a handout," Shaffer said.

The Legislature recessed for the holidays Wednesday, but scheduled one last legislative day Dec. 29 because some current sanctions expire at the end of the month "and the last thing we want to do is to put people with needs without means" if Granholm vetoes some of the package.

"We want to put resources up front," Shaffer said. "What can we do to support people on the front end of the program? Whether it's eliminating physical barriers or educational barriers. At the same time, Michigan is one of the very few, if not the only state, that doesn't have an expiration in its welfare program."

Shaffer, the assistant majority whip, said lawmakers' goal is to let citizens know "loud and clear that there does come a day when people have to be responsible for their lives.

"It's a good package, in my opinion, that was passed out of the House and passed out of the Senate. One step I believe that's been in the right direction is that the governor looked at me in early summer and said, 'Rep. Shaffer, I will never sign your 48-month program.' She has now warmed up to saying there does need to be some limitations. I'm hopeful. The stumbling block tends to be a couple of strikes and out. The package calls for a 90-day strike, a 90-day strike if you fail to live up to your educational or work commitment, then a two-year sanction after the third strike. The fourth strike is completely out of the program."

Chris Siebenmark from Sen. Ron Jelinek's staff said this has been the Three Oaks Republican's busiest fall "by far" since he went to Lansing in 1997.

"Since the budget was done," Siebenmark said, "we've had legislation being moved through for job creation, business tax cuts, teacher insurance as well as retirement plans, water and welfare reform because the Legislature and the governor understand that we're still in a quagmire," as Michigan has been in the three years he has attended commission meetings on Jelinek's behalf.

"The number-one priority in Lansing is getting people back to work" through job creation and retention, Siebenmark said.

“One thing you might want to keep an eye on is Ron's legislation to expand the number of ag zones again up to 20.”

There is competition with Fremont, Ind., for the state's first biodiesel plant for \$9 million to be located in Bangor in Van Buren County.

“Agriculture is one of those areas that has continued to grow through the tough times Michigan's had,” Siebenmark said.

The state revenue estimating conference is set for Jan. 12. The Legislature returns to session Jan. 18.

Welfare reform on road to veto

Sunday, December 18, 2005

By Steven Harmon
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Anxieties are not running very high for welfare advocates, even as welfare reform rushed through the Republican state Legislature last week.

For that, they can thank Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who is poised to veto the legislation, which puts lifetime limits on cash assistance, possibly Monday.

"This legislation is headed for certain veto," said Liz Boyd, the governor's spokeswoman. "This penalizes people playing by the rules but can't get the breaks to lift themselves out of poverty. The sanctions are too severe and (this) does not include enough exceptions."

Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids, one of the reform measure's authors, said Granholm reversed course after initially backing lifetime limits.

The package would allow able-bodied adults to take cash assistance for up to 48 months; others, if they comply with certain requirements, could be eligible for another 12 months.

"She stated clearly 48 months was enough time for able-bodied adults to get off welfare if we provide enough resources," Kooiman said. "Why is she vetoing a bill that provides 60 months? From my perspective, it's pure politics. She got political pressure from folks who helped put her in office."

Granholm wants the Department of Human Services to have final say over who is exempted from lifetime limits, Kooiman wants to leave it up to caseworkers.

Opponents of the reform were pleased to hear Granholm would block the legislation, which they called punitive.

"She's speaking for those who don't have a voice," said Ellen James, a vice president of the Grand Rapids NAACP.

"If this is vetoed, I hope the legislators will go back and incorporate some of the ideas we presented."

Advocates met last week with Kooiman, expressing concern that caseworkers were overworked and were not the right people to make decisions on recipients' fate.

Some said they worried racial bias could be included in caseworkers' decisions.

Since the state's original welfare reform in the mid-1990s, the cash assistance caseload has dropped from 233,000 to 77,000, many of whom are considered the hard cases. With an unforgiving economy, advocates say the reform appears to be harsh.

"If the governor vetoes this, it'll make me feel good for poor people," said Paul Mayhue, a Democratic Kent County Commissioner of Grand Rapids and social worker. "We already have a high jobless rate, we've had national cuts in Medicaid, people are being laid off. And nobody has defined what self sufficiency or able-bodied is. This legislation should go in the trash can."

But Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, who guided the welfare reform through the Senate, said the package would have opened up opportunities to those who are stuck in the system.

Currently, recipients can attend a post-secondary school for up to 12 months and must work full-time. Under the legislation, recipients could go to school for up to 24 months and would be required to work 20 hours a week.

"There were a lot of good things in the bills that increase the flexibility for people," Hardiman said.

But Hardiman insisted sanctions had to be part of the deal.

"There have to be some sanctions, or stronger sanctions than we have now," he said. "That's what workers told us, that sanctions now aren't strong enough. People who don't want to adhere to the plan just blow it off."

State should end limitless welfare benefits

Our governor has the rare opportunity to lift those in poverty out of Michigan's welfare trap and provide the services they need with the accountability our taxpayers deserve ("Consider poor economy before changing welfare," Dec. 5).

The Legislature has passed a welfare reform package that provides this needed reform. Michigan is one of only four states in the country with no lifetime limit of benefits for able-bodied individuals.

In fact, Indiana has a two-year

limit, Ohio a three-year limit and Illinois a five-year limit and welfare law, signed by former President Bill Clinton in 1996, restricts the use of federal funding to five years. On Nov. 28, Gov. Jennifer Granholm said, "I don't think that for those who are able-bodied, that 48 months is too short." Our legislation allows the able-bodied to receive assistance for up to 48 months and apply for a 12-month extension if they have complied with the law and cannot find employment.

Our proposal provides fast-track

literacy programs, assistance in obtaining a high school diploma/GED and allows participation in up to 24 months of higher education or vocational training, while continuing to provide child care, transportation, parenting information, substance abuse treatment and domestic violence assistance.

Granholm should sign this fair but firm legislation.

STATE REP. JERRY KOODMAN
R-Grand Rapids

STATE REP. DAVID LAW
R-Commerce Township

House, Senate reach deal for \$41.6 billion in budget cuts

By CATHERINE DODGE
BLOOMBERG NEWS

WASHINGTON — House and Senate negotiators agreed Sunday to \$41.6 billion in budget cuts over five years that target benefit programs such as Medicaid and student loans as part of a Republican-led effort to narrow the federal deficit.

Negotiators removed from the package a plan to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration, eliminated \$700 million in cuts to

food stamps and pared reductions to other welfare programs because some Republicans and most Democrats objected to the provisions. The oil drilling proposal was added to a defense budget that House and Senate negotiators approved Sunday.

"We have an opportunity, and it's an opportunity to reform," said House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle, R-Iowa. "It does achieve savings, and it delivers a better product to the people intended."

The 2006 budget passed by Congress in April called for finding \$35 billion in savings over five years through a combination of spending cuts and revenue-raising measures. The spending cuts are the cornerstone of President George W. Bush's efforts to decrease the budget deficit to \$260.5 billion by 2009.

Since Bush came to office in 2001, a budget surplus of \$236 billion has been transformed into a \$319-billion deficit. The agreement Sunday was a com-

promise between a House plan calling for \$50 billion in savings and a Senate package seeking \$35 billion.

House Republicans called for greater savings to help offset \$62.3 billion they approved in hurricane aid for the gulf coast.

The House was expected to vote on the plan by this morning. The Senate is expected to vote on the plan early this week, and then it would go to the president for his signature.

Agreement

The compromise eases cuts proposed by the House and brings them closer to the Senate's version.

MEDICAID: The plan cuts growth in Medicaid spending by about \$4.8 billion, less than the \$11 billion the House wanted. It also eases House-proposed cuts to child-support programs.

STUDENT LOANS: Reductions to student-loan programs will be about \$12.8 billion, less than the

\$14.3 billion proposed in the House.

The compromise also slows a House plan to repeal the so-called Byrd Amendment, a contentious measure that allows duties on foreign imports to be distributed to companies. The program will be phased out over two years under the agreement.

The major hurdle to an agreement was the Alaska oil drilling. Republicans who support drilling, including Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska, are trying to get it passed as part of the Defense Department budget. Democrats object, saying it will complicate passage of a measure that provides money for U.S. troops.

Budget deficit

Republicans said the savings are needed to reduce a budget deficit that reached \$319 billion in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, down from \$412.8 billion in the previous fiscal year. Democrats are against the budget-cutting plan, saying it reduces resources for the needy.

Detroit

Mom held after cops discover dead boy

She and others lived with body

December 19, 2005

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Lillian Leak's nightmare began Dec. 8, when she asked where her 9-month-old grandson Malik was.

Malik's mother -- her son's 21-year-old girlfriend -- said the baby was with her friend for the weekend so she could get a break. For the next seven days, Leak said Sunday, Malik's mother lived and interacted with her and her children and grandchildren as if nothing was wrong.

As if Malik's body wasn't wrapped in a trash bag and stuffed into a cabinet in Leak's home on Hickory Avenue in northeast Detroit -- in the basement where Leak's six children and two grandchildren frequently play.

Malik's mother -- who is in police custody -- left Leak's home Thursday, saying she was going to get her baby back from her friend. Leak, 40, said she felt relieved hearing that the baby was all right. But she heard nothing more until 4 a.m. Saturday, when Detroit police pounded on her door.

Malik's mother had gone to St. John Hospital for a diabetic condition late Friday or early Saturday and told a doctor that her baby was missing, perhaps kidnapped.

Police were called.

Based on statements the mother apparently made to police about the baby, officers checked the dark basement of Leak's four-bedroom home, then returned two hours later with a trained dog.

Officers returned to Leak's home a third time, about 9:30 a.m. Saturday. They found Malik O'Neal's body within about 10 minutes, Leak said.

"That's when I started crying and screaming," Leak said.

Homicide Sgt. William Anderson said Sunday that autopsy results were pending, but that detectives believe they know the cause of the baby's death, based on the mother's statements to police.

Anderson would not disclose how the child died.

"There was no obvious abuse or trauma," Anderson said.

The mother is being held in the Eastern District Station, formerly known as the 9th (Gratiot) Precinct, pending charges that are expected to be filed today, Anderson said.

She and the child's father, Milo Leak, also 21, had attended special-education classes at Denby High School in Detroit together, Leak said. The mother graduated in 2004 and moved in with her boyfriend's family in July, Leak said.

Milo Leak has been in the Macomb County Jail for two months on a concealed-weapons charge. Lillian Leak said he warned her to watch out for Malik.

" 'Momma, she's trying to kill my baby,' " Leak said her son told her recently. " 'You got to watch him.' "

Malik often cried while in his mother's care, Leak said, but always was relaxed and happy when he was with other relatives.

"That boy was beautiful," Leak said. "His spirit was beautiful. ... He smiled continuously."

Leak said she suspected Malik had been abused and had called state child abuse investigators twice in July. When investigators saw Malik, Leak said, he had gained weight and recovered from two black eyes.

State Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow said Sunday that she did not know whether her department was involved with the family, but would have the case reviewed.

"Certainly, any time a child dies, we look into the circumstances, especially if we have been involved in some way," Udow said. "Any child's death is a tragedy, and we have to do everything we can to understand what happened in that situation and if we could have done more."

Leak said it was strange how Malik's mother lived with the family for days, pretending the baby was alive.

"She kept a straight face," Leak said. "She acted normal, like she believed it."

She said she doesn't have any recent pictures of Malik. Among her plans for Christmas was to take the family to a photographic studio next week for portraits, she said.

"I felt I was doing all I can to see to the child," Leak said. "It wasn't enough."

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or kresnak@freepress.com.

How you can help prevent a tragedy

- To report suspected child abuse or neglect, call your county Department of Human Services. These numbers are answered 24 hours a day:

Wayne: 313-963-6006

Oakland: 248-975-5010

Macomb: 586-412-6109

Monroe: 734-243-7400

Genesee: 810-760-2222

Washtenaw: 734-481-9110

Livingston: 517-546-8668

Toddler Death Called a Homicide

Elizabeth Gelineau
Courtesy GR Press

Created: 12/15/2005 11:19:41 AM

Updated: 12/16/2005 12:34:44 PM

Georgetown Township - The Ottawa County Sheriff's Department is investigating the murder of a 16-month-old Elizabeth Rose Gelineau.

Lt. Mark Bennett said of the Medical Examiner's report, "He's concluded that the 16-month-old died of non-accidental injuries.", says Bennett. Elizabeth was pronounced dead at her home Sunday night after paramedics were unable to revive her.

Lt. Bennett said, "At this point in the investigation we're continuing to compile information trying to set up timelines as to the child's last few days and go on from there." says Bennett.

Elizabeth was living with her great-grandparents at the time. Her mother was also staying at the home and had court-ordered supervision of her child.

The child had no contact with her father at the time and he is not considered a suspect in this case.

However, Elizabeth was the victim of prior abuse. That abuse involved a fractured skull and ribs. The crime occurred just 11 days after she was born.

Her father, John Gelineau, plead no contest to those a charge of second degree child abuse and served 90 days in jail.

But again, because he's had no contact with his daughter since, he's not considered a suspect in this case.

The Medical Examiner determined Elizabeth's injuries were very recent.

Published December 17, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

4 in Mich. charged in child sex ring Government crackdown leads to 19 arrests nationally

By Mark Sherman
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Prostitution rings from New York to Hawaii forced more than 30 children as young as 12 to have sex at truck stops, hotels and brothels, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said Friday, announcing a government crackdown.

Nineteen people have been arrested among 31 who have been indicted for sexual trafficking in children, taking minors across state lines for prostitution and other crimes, Gonzales said.

The indictments, in Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, target the purported operators of four child prostitution rings. Some of the children had been reported missing or had run away because they had been abused at home, FBI assistant director Chris Swecker said.

In Detroit, a grand jury charged four Ohio residents with forcing two girls, 14 and 15, to have sex at a truck stop in Michigan. The girls had been held as virtual prisoners in Toledo, Ohio, where they were told to address one defendant, Deric Willoughby, as "Daddy," and taken to hotel rooms for prostitution. Their payments were eventually turned over to Willoughby, the indictment said.

Another defendant, Richard Lamar Gordon, is identified in the indictment as a truck driver who took the girls from a Sears parking lot in the Toledo area to the Michigan truck stop and had sex with one of them. He has not been arrested.

A second indictment in Michigan charges Detroit residents Robert Lewis Young, 44, Jeffrey McCoy, 44, and George Abro, 29, with prostitution, child pornography, money laundering and drug and weapons violations. A prostitution ring run by Young did business in Michigan and Hawaii, prosecutors said.

"The abhorrent acts alleged in these charges include children being herded around the country as sex slaves, forced to work as prostitutes in brothels and at truck stops, and beaten at the hands of pimps and peddlers," Gonzales said at a Justice Department news conference.

The heightened federal interest in stopping child prostitution is critical since pimps frequently take children from one state to another, making it harder for local police to stop them, said John Rabun, vice president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "If you're bright as a pimp, and thank God a lot of them aren't, you move them every two to three weeks," Rabun said.

A grand jury in Camden, N.J., indicted eight people Wednesday on charges that they conspired to recruit girls to be prostitutes in Atlantic City, N.J., Las Vegas and New York, according to court documents. The defendants managed a prostitution ring that also extended to Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia, the indictment said.

19 Arrested in Federal Crackdown on Child Prostitution Rings

Associated Press

Saturday, December 17, 2005

Prostitution rings from New York to Hawaii forced 30 children, some as young as 12, to have sex at truck stops, hotels and brothels, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said yesterday in announcing a government crackdown.

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In Detroit, a grand jury charged four Ohio residents with forcing two girls, 14 and 15, to have sex at a truck stop in Michigan. The girls had been held as prisoners in Toledo, Ohio, where they were told to address one defendant as "Daddy," and taken to hotel rooms for prostitution. A second indictment in Michigan charges three men with prostitution, child pornography, money laundering, and drug and weapons violations. Their organization did business in Michigan and Hawaii, prosecutors said.

In Pennsylvania, 16 people have been charged for their roles in taking girls as young as 12 to work as prostitutes at truck stops in the Harrisburg area and in Washington and Toledo. The defendants also allegedly gave and sold child and adult prostitutes to one another for personal use, prosecutors said.

Domestic child prostitution cases have been a federal law enforcement priority since 2003 with the Justice Department's Innocence Lost Initiative. When Gonzales became attorney general in February, he said he would focus on reducing all forms of human trafficking. There have been more than 500 arrests, 70 indictments and 67 convictions in such cases since 2003, he said.

Through His Webcam, a Boy Joins a Sordid Online World

By **KURT EICHENWALD**

The New York Times

Published: December 19, 2005

The 13-year-old boy sat in his California home, eyes fixed on a computer screen. He had never run with the popular crowd and long ago had turned to the Internet for the friends he craved. But on this day, Justin Berry's fascination with cyberspace would change his life.

Weeks before, Justin had hooked up a Web camera to his computer, hoping to use it to meet other teenagers online. Instead, he heard only from men who chatted with him by instant message as they watched his image on the Internet. To Justin, they seemed just like friends, ready with compliments and always offering gifts.

Now, on an afternoon in 2000, one member of his audience sent a proposal: he would pay Justin \$50 to sit bare-chested in front of his Webcam for three minutes. The man explained that Justin could receive the money instantly and helped him open an account on PayPal.com, an online payment system.

"I figured, I took off my shirt at the pool for nothing," he said recently. "So, I was kind of like, what's the difference?"

Justin removed his T-shirt. The men watching him oozed compliments.

So began the secret life of a teenager who was lured into selling images of his body on the Internet over the course of five years. From the seduction that began that day, this soccer-playing honor roll student was drawn into performing in front of the Webcam - undressing, showering, masturbating and even having sex - for an audience of more than 1,500 people who paid him, over the years, hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Justin's dark coming-of-age story is a collateral effect of recent technological advances. Minors, often under the online tutelage of adults, are opening for-pay pornography sites featuring their own images sent onto the Internet by inexpensive Webcams. And they perform from the privacy of home, while parents are nearby, beyond their children's closed bedroom doors.

The business has created youthful Internet pornography stars - with nicknames like Riotboyy, Miss Honey and Gigglez - whose images are traded online long after their sites have vanished. In this world, adolescents announce schedules of their next masturbation for customers who pay fees for the performance or monthly subscription charges. Eager customers can even buy "private shows," in which teenagers sexually perform while following real-time instructions.

A six-month investigation by The New York Times into this corner of the Internet found that such sites had emerged largely without attracting the attention of law enforcement or youth protection organizations. While experts with these groups said they had witnessed a recent deluge of illicit, self-generated Webcam images, they had not known of the evolution of sites where minors sold images of themselves for money.

"We've been aware of the use of the Webcam and its potential use by exploiters," said Ernest E. Allen, chief executive of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a private group. "But this is a variation on a theme that we haven't seen. It's unbelievable."

Minors who run these sites find their anonymity amusing, joking that their customers may be the only adults who know of their activities. It is, in the words of one teenage site operator, the "Webcam Matrix," a reference to the movie in which a computerized world exists without the knowledge of most of humanity.

In this virtual universe, adults hunt for minors on legitimate sites used by Webcam owners who post contact information in hopes of attracting friends. If children respond to messages, adults spend time "grooming" them - with praise, attention and gifts - before seeking to persuade them to film themselves pornographically.

The lure is the prospect of easy money. Many teenagers solicit "donations," request gifts through sites like Amazon.com or negotiate payments, while a smaller number charge monthly fees. But there are other beneficiaries, including businesses, some witting and some unwitting, that provide services to the sites like Web hosting and payment processing.

Not all victims profit, with some children ending up as pornographic commodities inadvertently, even unknowingly. Adolescents have appeared naked on their Webcams as a joke, or as presents for boyfriends or girlfriends, only to have their images posted on for-pay pornography sites. One Web site proclaims that it features 140,000 images of "adolescents in cute panties exposing themselves on their teen Webcams." Entry into this side of cyberspace is simplicity itself. Webcams cost as little as \$20, and the number of them being used has mushroomed to 15 million, according to IDC, an industry consulting group. At the same time, instant messaging programs have become ubiquitous, and high-speed connections, allowing for rapid image transmission, are common.

The scale of Webcam child pornography is unknown, because it is new and extremely secretive. One online portal that advertises for-pay Webcam sites, many of them pornographic, lists at least 585 sites created by teenagers, internal site records show. At one computer bulletin board for adults attracted to adolescents, a review of postings over the course of a week revealed Webcam image postings of at least 98 minors. The Times inquiry has already resulted in a large-scale criminal investigation. In June, The Times located Justin Berry, then 18. In interviews, Justin revealed the existence of a group of more than 1,500 men who paid for his online images, as well as evidence that other identifiable children as young as 13 were being actively exploited. In a series of meetings, The Times persuaded Justin to abandon his business and, to protect other children at risk, assisted him in contacting the Justice Department. Arrests and indictments of adults he identified as pornography producers and traffickers began in September. Investigators are also focusing on businesses, including credit card processors that have aided illegal sites. Anyone who has created, distributed, marketed, possessed or paid to view such pornography is open to a criminal charge.

"The fact that we are getting so many potential targets, people who knowingly bought into a child pornographic Web site, could lead to hundreds of other subjects and potentially save hundreds of other kids that we are not aware of yet," said Monique Winkis, a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation who is working the case.

Law enforcement officials also said that, with the cooperation of Justin, they had obtained a rare guide into this secluded online world whose story illuminates the exploitation that takes place there.

"I didn't want these people to hurt any more kids," Justin said recently of his decision to become a federal witness. "I didn't want anyone else to live the life I lived."

A High-Tech Transformation

Not long ago, the distribution of child pornography in America was a smallish trade, relegated to back rooms and corners where even the proprietors of X-rated bookstores refused to loiter.

By the mid-1980's, however, technology had transformed the business, with pedophiles going online to communicate anonymously and post images through rudimentary bulletin board systems. As Internet use boomed in the 1990's, these adults honed their computer skills, finding advanced ways to meet online and swap illegal photos; images once hard to obtain were suddenly available with the click of a mouse.

As the decade drew to a close, according to experts and records of online conversations, these adults began openly fantasizing of the day they would be able to reach out to children directly, through instant messaging and live video, to obtain the pornography they desired.

Their dream was realized with the Web camera, which transformed online pornography the way the automobile changed transportation. At first, the cameras, some priced at more than \$100, offered little more than grainy snapshots, "refreshed" a few times per minute. But it was not long before easy-to-use \$20 Webcams could transmit high-quality continuous color video across the globe instantly.

By 2000, things had worked out exactly the way the pedophiles hoped. Webcams were the rage among computer-savvy minors, creating a bountiful selection of potential targets.

Among them was Justin Berry. That year, he was a gangly 13-year-old with saucer eyes and brown hair that he often dyed blond. He lived with his mother, stepfather and younger sister in Bakersfield, Calif., a midsize city about 90 miles north of Los Angeles. Already he was so adept at the computer that he had registered his own small Web site development business, which he ran from the desk where he did his schoolwork.

So Justin was fascinated when a friend showed off the free Webcam he had received for joining Earthlink, an Internet service provider. The device was simple and elegant. As Justin remembers it, he quickly signed up, too, eager for his own Webcam.

"I didn't really have a lot of friends," he recalled, "and I thought having a Webcam might help me make some new ones online, maybe even meet some girls my age."

As soon as Justin hooked the camera to his bedroom computer and loaded the software, his picture was automatically posted on spotlife.com, an Internet directory of Webcam users, along with his contact information. Then he waited to hear from other teenagers.

No one Justin's age ever contacted him from that listing. But within minutes he heard from his first online predator. That man was soon followed by another, then another.

Justin remembers his earliest communications with these men as nonthreatening, pleasant encounters. There were some oddities - men who pretended to be teenage girls, only to slip up and reveal the truth later - but Justin enjoyed his online community.

His new friends were generous. One explained how to put together a "wish list" on Amazon.com, where Justin could ask for anything, including computer equipment, toys, music CD's or movies. Anyone who knew his wish-list name - Justin Camboy - could buy him a gift. Amazon delivered the presents without revealing his address to the buyers.

The men also filled an emotional void in Justin's life. His relationship with his father, Knute Berry, was troubled. His parents divorced when he was young; afterward, police records show, there were instances of reported abuse. On one occasion Mr. Berry was arrested and charged with slamming Justin's head into a wall, causing an injury that required seven staples in his scalp. Although Justin testified against him, Mr. Berry said the injury was an accident and was acquitted. He declined to comment in a telephone interview.

The emotional turmoil left Justin longing for paternal affection, family members said. And the adult males he met online offered just that. "They complimented me all the time," Justin said. "They told me I was smart, they told me I was handsome."

In that, experts said, the eighth-grade boy's experience reflected the standard methods used by predatory adults to insinuate themselves into the lives of minors they meet online.

"In these cases, there are problems in their own lives that make them predisposed to" manipulation by adults, Lawrence Likar, a former F.B.I. supervisor, said of children persuaded to pose for pornography. "The predators know that and are able to tap into these problems and offer what appear to be solutions."

Justin's mother, Karen Page, said she sensed nothing out of the ordinary. Her son seemed to be just a boy talented with computers who enjoyed speaking to friends online. The Webcam, as she saw it, was just another device that would improve her son's computer skills, and maybe even help him on his Web site development business.

"Everything I ever heard was that children should be exposed to computers and given every opportunity to learn from them," Ms. Page said in an interview.

She never guessed that one of her son's first lessons after turning on his Webcam was that adults would eagerly pay him just to disrobe a little.

The Instant Audience

It was as if the news shot around the Web. By appearing on camera bare-chested, Justin sent an important message: here was a boy who would do things for money.

Gradually the requests became bolder, the cash offers larger: More than \$100 for Justin to pose in his underwear. Even more if the boxers came down. The latest request was always just slightly beyond the last, so that each new step never struck him as considerably different. How could adults be so organized at manipulating young people with Webcams?

Unknown to Justin, they honed their persuasive skills by discussing strategy online, sharing advice on how to induce their young targets to go further at each stage.

Moreover, these adults are often people adept at manipulating teenagers. In its investigation, The Times obtained the names and credit card information for the 1,500 people who paid Justin to perform on camera, and analyzed the backgrounds of 300 of them nationwide. A majority of the sample consisted of doctors and lawyers, businessmen and teachers, many of whom work with children on a daily basis.

Not long ago, adults sexually attracted to children were largely isolated from one another. But the Internet has created a virtual community where they can readily communicate and reinforce their feelings, experts said. Indeed, the messages they send among themselves provide not only self-justification, but also often blame minors with Webcam sites for offering temptation.

"These kids are the ones being manipulative," wrote an adult who called himself Upandc in a posting this year to a bulletin board for adults attracted to children.

Or, as an adult who called himself DLW wrote: "Did a sexual predator MAKE them make a site? No. Did they decide to do it for themselves? Yes."

Tempting as it may be for some in society to hold the adolescent Webcam operators responsible, experts in the field say that is misguided, because it fails to recognize the control that adults exercise over highly impressionable minors.

"The world will want to blame the kids, but the reality is, they are victims here," said Mr. Allen of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

But there is no doubt that the minors cash in on their own exploitation. With Justin, for example, the road to cyberporn stardom was paved with cool new equipment. When his growing legion of fans complained about the quality of his Webcam, he put top-rated cameras and computer gear on his Amazon wish list, and his fans rushed to buy him all of it.

A \$35 Asante four-port hub, which allowed for the use of multiple cameras, was bought by someone calling himself Wesley Taylor, Amazon receipts show. For \$45, a fan nicknamed tuckertheboy bought a Viking memory upgrade to speed up Justin's broadcast. And then there were cameras - a \$60 color Webcam by Hawking Technologies from banjo000; a \$60 Intel Deluxe USB camera from boyking12; and a \$150 Hewlett-Packard camera from eplayernine.

Justin's desk became a high-tech playhouse. To avoid suspicions, he hid the Webcams behind his desk until nighttime. Whenever his mother asked about his new technology and money, Justin told her they were fruits of his Web site development business. In a way, it was true; with one fan's help, he had by then opened his own pornographic Web site, called justinscam.com.

His mother saw little evidence of a boy in trouble. Justin's grades stayed good - mostly A's and B's, although his school attendance declined as he faked illness to spend time with his Webcam.

As he grew familiar with the online underground, Justin learned he was not alone in the business. Other teenagers were doing the same things, taking advantage of an Internet infrastructure of support that was perfectly suited to illicit business.

As a result, while it helped to have Justin's computer skills, even minors who fumbled with technology could operate successful pornography businesses. Yahoo, America Online and MSN were starting to offer free instant message services that contained embedded ability to transmit video, with no expertise required. The programs were offered online, without parental controls. No telltale credit card numbers or other identifying information was necessary. In minutes, any adolescent could have a video and text system up and running, without anyone knowing, a fact that concerns some law enforcement officials.

There were also credit card processing services that handled payments without requiring tax identification numbers. There were companies that helped stream live video onto the Internet - including one in Indiana that offered the service at no charge if the company president could watch free. And there were sites - portals, in the Web vernacular - that took paid advertising from teenage Webcam addresses and allowed fans to vote for their favorites.

Teenagers, hungry for praise, compete for rankings on the portals as desperately as contestants on TV reality shows, offering special performances in exchange for votes. "Everyone please vote me a 10 on my cam site," a girl nicknamed Thunderrockracin told her subscribers in 2002, "and I will have a live sleep cam!"

In other words, she would let members watch her sleep if they boosted her up the rankings.

Fearing the Fans

Justin began to feel he belonged to something important, a broad community of teenagers with their own businesses. Some he knew by their real names, others by the screen names they used for their sites - Strider, Stoner, Kitty, Calvin, Emily, Seth and so on. But collectively, they were known by a name now commonplace in this Internet subculture:

They call themselves "camwhores."

Justin chatted with the boys online, and sometimes persuaded the girls to masturbate on camera while he did the same. Often, he heard himself compared to Riotboyy, another young-looking teenager whose site had experienced as many as 6,400 hits in a single week.

In conversations with Justin, other minors with for-pay sites admitted to being scared of certain fans. Some adults wrote things like "It wants to possess you." They had special wardrobe requests for the adolescents: in jeans with a belt, without a belt, with a lacy bra, showing legs, showing feet, wearing boxers with an erection, and others.

One 16-year-old who called himself hot boyy 23 finally found the entreaties too much. "Hey guys," he wrote when he shut down his site, "I'm sorry, there are just too many freaks out there for me. I need to live a more normal life, too. I might be back someday and I might not. I'm sorry I had to ruin all the fun."

It was not only the minors operating Webcam sites for pay who faced frightening adults. Earlier this year, a teenage girl in Alabama posed seminude on her Webcam in a sexually charged conversation with someone she thought was another teenage girl. But her new confidant, it turned out, was an adult named Julio Bardales from Napa, Calif., law enforcement officials said. And when the girl stopped complying, she received an e-mail message from Mr. Bardales containing a montage of her images. Across them was a threat in red letters that the images would be revealed unless she showed a frontal nude shot over the Webcam. Mr. Bardales was subsequently arrested. The police said he possessed images of more under-age girls on Webcams, including other montages with the same threat.

Justin says that he did not fully understand the dangers his fans posed, and before he turned 14, he was first lured from the relative safety of his home. A man he met online hosted Justin's Web site from Ann Arbor, Mich., and invited him there to attend a computer camp. Justin's mother allowed him to go, thinking the camp sounded worthwhile.

Another time, the man enticed Justin to Michigan by promising to arrange for him to have sex with a girl. Both times, Justin said, the man molested him. Transcripts of their subsequent conversations online support the accusations, and a video viewed by The Times shows that the man, who appears for a short time in the recording, also taped pornography of Justin.

From then on, Justin's personality took on a harder edge, evident in the numerous instant messages he made available to The Times. He became an aggressive negotiator of prices for his performances. Emboldened by a growing contempt for his audience, he would sometimes leave their questions unanswered for hours, just to prove to himself that they would wait for him.

"These people had no lives," Justin said. "They would never get mad."

Unnerved by menacing messages from a fan of his first site, Justin opened a new one called jfwy.com, an online acronym that loosely translates into "just messing with you." This time, following an idea suggested by one of his fans, he charged subscribers \$45 a month. In addition, he could command large individual payments for private shows, sometimes \$300 for an hourlong performance.

"What's in the hour?" inquired a subscriber named Gran0Stan in one typical exchange in 2002. "What do you do?"

"I'll do everything, if you know what I mean," Justin replied.

Gran0Stan was eager to watch, and said the price was fine. "When?" he asked.

"Tonight," Justin said. "After my mom goes to sleep."

As his obsession with the business grew, Justin became a ferocious competitor. When another under-age site operator called Strider ranked higher on a popular portal, Justin sent him anonymous e-mail messages, threatening to pass along images from Strider's site to the boy's father. The site disappeared.

"I was vicious," Justin said. "But I guess I really did Strider a favor. Looking back, I wish someone had done that to me."

By then, fans had begun offering Justin cash to meet. Gilo Tunno, a former Intel employee, gave him thousands of dollars to visit him in a Las Vegas hotel, according to financial records and other documents. There, Justin said, Mr. Tunno began a series of molestings. At least one assault was videotaped and the recording e-mailed to Justin, who has since turned it over to the F.B.I.

Mr. Tunno played another critical role in Justin's business, the records show. When he was 15, Justin worried that his mother might discover what he was doing. So he asked Mr. Tunno to sign an apartment lease for him and pay rent. Justin promised to raise money to pay a share. "I'll whore," he explained in a message to Mr. Tunno.

Mr. Tunno agreed, signing a lease for \$410 a month for an apartment just down the street from Justin's house. From then on, Justin would tell his mother he was visiting friends, then head to the apartment for his next

performance. Mr. Tunno, who remains under investigation in the case, is serving an eight-year federal sentence on an unrelated sexual abuse charge involving a child and could not be reached for comment.

The rental symbolized a problem that Justin had not foreseen: his adult fans would do almost anything to ensure that his performances continued. At its worst, they would stand between him and the people in his offline life whom they saw as a threat to his Webcam appearances.

For example, when a girlfriend of Justin's tried to convince him to shut down his site in December 2002, a customer heaped scorn on her.

"She actually gets mad at you for buying her things with the money you make from the cam?" messaged the customer, a man using the nickname Angelaa. "Just try and remember, Justin, that she may not love you, but most of us in your chat room, your friends, love you very much."

A Life Falls Apart

In early 2003, Justin's offline life began to unravel. A former classmate found pornographic videos on the Internet from Justin's Web site, made copies and handed them out around town, including to students at his school. Justin was taunted and beaten.

Feeling embarrassed and unable to continue at school, Justin begged his mother to allow him to be home-schooled through an online program. Knowing he was having trouble with classmates, but in the dark about the reasons why, she agreed.

Then, in February, came another traumatic event. Justin had begun speaking with his father, hoping to repair their relationship. But that month, Mr. Berry, who had been charged with insurance fraud related to massage clinics he ran, disappeared without a word.

Despairing, Justin turned to his online fans. "My dad left. I guess he doesn't love me," he wrote. "Why did I let him back in my life? Let me die, just let me die."

His father did not disappear for long. Soon, Mr. Berry called his son from Mazatlán, Mexico; Justin begged to join him, and his father agreed.

In Mexico, Justin freely spent his cash, leading his father to ask where the money had come from. Justin said that he confessed the details of his lucrative Webcam business, and that the reunion soon became a collaboration. Justin created a new Web site, calling it mexicofriends, his most ambitious ever. It featured Justin having live sex with prostitutes. During some of Justin's sexual encounters, a traffic tracker on his site showed hundreds watching. It rapidly became a wildly popular Webcam pornography site, making Justin one of the Internet's most sought after under-age pornography stars.

For this site, Justin, then 16, used a pricing model favored by legitimate businesses. For standard subscribers, the cost was \$35, billed monthly. But discounts were available for three-month, six-month and annual memberships. Justin used the cash to support a growing cocaine and marijuana habit.

Money from the business, Justin said, was shared with his father, an accusation supported by transcripts of their later instant message conversations. In exchange, Justin told prosecutors and The Times, his father helped procure prostitutes. One video obtained by the F.B.I. shows Mr. Berry sitting with Justin as the camera is turned on, then making the bed before a prostitute arrives to engage in intercourse with his teenage son. Asked about Justin's accusations, Mr. Berry said, "Obviously, I am not going to comment on anything."

In the fall of 2003, Justin's life took a new turn when a subscriber named Greg Mitchel, a 36-year-old fast food restaurant manager from Dublin, Va., struck up an online friendship with the boy and soon asked to visit him. Seeing a chance to generate cash, Justin agreed.

Mr. Mitchel arrived that October, and while in Mexico, molested Justin for what would be the first of many times, according to transcripts of their conversations and other evidence. Mr. Mitchel, who is in jail awaiting trial on six child pornography charges stemming from this case, could not be reached for comment.

Over the following year, Justin tried repeatedly to break free of this life. He roamed the United States. He contemplated suicide. For a time he sought solace in a return to his boyhood Christianity. At one point he dismantled his site, loading it instead with Biblical teachings - and taking delight in knowing the surprise his subscribers would experience when they logged on to watch him have sex.

But his drug craving, and the need for money to satisfy it, was always there. Soon, Mr. Mitchel beckoned, urging Justin to return to pornography and offering to be his business partner. With Mr. Mitchel, records and interviews show, Justin created a new Web site, justinsfriends.com, featuring performances by him and other

boys he helped recruit. But as videos featuring other minors appeared on his site, Justin felt torn, knowing that these adolescents were on the path that had hurt him so badly.

Justin was now 18, a legal adult. He had crossed the line from under-age victim to adult perpetrator.

A Look Behind the Secrecy

In June, Justin began communicating online with someone who had never messaged him before. The conversations involved many questions, and Justin feared his new contact might be an F.B.I. agent. Still, when a meeting was suggested, Justin agreed. He says part of him hoped he would be arrested, putting an end to the life he was leading.

They met in Los Angeles, and Justin learned that the man was this reporter, who wanted to discuss the world of Webcam pornography with him. After some hesitation, Justin agreed. At one point, asked what he wanted to accomplish in his life, Justin pondered for a moment and replied that he wanted to make his mother and grandmother proud of him.

The next day, Justin began showing the inner workings of his online world. Using a laptop computer, he signed on to the Internet and was quickly bombarded with messages from men urging him to turn on his Webcam and strip.

One man described, without prompting, what he remembered seeing of Justin's genitals during a show. Another asked Justin to recount the furthest distance he had ever ejaculated. Still another offered an unsolicited description of the sexual acts he would perform on Justin if they met.

"This guy is really a pervert," Justin said. "He kind of scares me."

As the sexual pleadings continued, Justin's hands trembled. His pale face dampened with perspiration. For a moment he tried to seem tough, but the protective facade did not last. He turned off the computer without a final word to his online audience.

In the days that followed, Justin agreed in discussions with this reporter to abandon the drugs and his pornography business. He cut himself off from his illicit life. He destroyed his cellphone, stopped using his online screen name and fled to a part of the country where no one would find him.

As he sobered up, Justin disclosed more of what he knew about the Webcam world; within a week, he revealed the names and locations of children who were being actively molested or exploited by adults with Webcam sites. After confirming his revelations, The Times urged him to give his information to prosecutors, and he agreed.

Justin contacted Steven M. Ryan, a former federal prosecutor and partner with Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in Washington. Mr. Ryan had learned of Justin's story during an interview with The Times about a related legal question, and offered to represent him.

On July 14, Mr. Ryan contacted the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Justice Department, informing prosecutors that he had a client with evidence that could implicate potentially hundreds of people. By then, Mr. Ryan had learned that some of Justin's old associates, disturbed by his disappearance, were hunting for him and had begun removing records from the Internet. Mr. Ryan informed prosecutors of the dangers to Justin and the potential destruction of evidence. Two weeks passed with little response.

Finally, in late July, Justin met in Washington with the F.B.I. and prosecutors. He identified children who he believed were in the hands of adult predators. He listed the marketers, credit card processors and others who supported Webcam child pornography. He also described the voluminous documentary evidence he had retained on his hard drives: financial information, conversation transcripts with his members, and other records. But that evidence would not be turned over, Mr. Ryan said, until Justin received immunity.

The meeting ended, followed by weeks of silence. Word came back that prosecutors were wrestling with Justin's dual role as a victim and a perpetrator. Justin told associates that he was willing to plead guilty if the government would save the children he had identified; Mr. Ryan dissuaded him.

By September, almost 50 days had passed since the first contact with the government, with no visible progress. Frustrated, Mr. Ryan informed prosecutors that he would have to go elsewhere, and contacted the California attorney general.

That proved unnecessary. Prodded by the F.B.I. and others in the Justice Department, on Sept. 7, prosecutors informed Mr. Ryan that his client would be granted immunity. A little more than four weeks after his 19th birthday, Justin became a federal witness.

A Final Online Confrontation

Five days later, on the third floor of a lakeside house in Dublin, Va., Greg Mitchel - Justin's 38-year-old business partner on his pornography Web site - rested on his bed as he chatted online with others in his illicit business.

Ever since Justin's disappearance weeks before, things had been tense for Mr. Mitchel. Some in the business already suspected that Justin might be talking to law enforcement. One associate had already declared to Mr. Mitchel that, if Justin was revealing their secrets, he would kill the boy.

But this night, Sept. 12, the news on Mr. Mitchel's computer screen was particularly disquieting. An associate in Tennessee sent word that the F.B.I. had just raided a Los Angeles computer server used by an affiliated Webcam site. Then, to Mr. Mitchel's surprise, Justin himself appeared online under a new screen name and sent a greeting.

Mr. Mitchel pleaded with Justin to come out of hiding, inviting the teenager on an all-expense-paid trip to Las Vegas with him and a 15-year-old boy also involved in Webcam pornography. But Justin demurred.

"You act like you're in witness protection," Mr. Mitchel typed. "Are you?"

"Haha," Justin replied. Did Mr. Mitchel think he would be on the Internet if he was a federal witness? he asked.

Justin changed the subject, later asking the whereabouts of others who lived with Mr. Mitchel, including two adolescents; Mr. Mitchel replied that everyone was home that night.

In a location in the Southwest, Justin glanced from his computer screen to a speakerphone. On the line was a team of F.B.I. agents who at that moment were pulling several cars into Mr. Mitchel's driveway, preparing to arrest him.

"The kids are in the house!" Justin shouted into the phone, answering a question posed by one of the agents. As agents approached the house, Justin knew he had little time left. He decided to confront the man who had hurt him for so long.

"Do you even remember how many times you stuck your hand down my pants?" he typed.

Mr. Mitchel responded that many bad things had happened, but he wanted to regain Justin's trust.

"You molested me," Justin replied. "Don't apologize for what you can't admit."

There was no response. "Peekaboo?" Justin typed.

On the screen, a message appeared that Mr. Mitchel had signed off. The arrest was over.

Justin thrust his hands into the air. "Yes!" he shouted.

In the weeks since the first arrest, F.B.I. agents and prosecutors have focused on numerous other potential defendants. For example, Tim Richards, identified by Justin as a marketer and principal of justinsfriends.com, was arrested in Nashville last month and arraigned on child pornography charges. According to law enforcement officials, Mr. Richards was stopped in a moving van in his driveway, accompanied by a young teenage boy featured by Mr. Richards on his own Webcam site. Mr. Richards has pleaded not guilty.

Hundreds of thousands of computer files, including e-mail containing a vast array of illegal images sent among adults, have been seized from around the country. Information about Justin's members has been downloaded by the F.B.I. from Neova.net, the company that processed the credit cards; Neova and its owner, Aaron Brown, are targets of the investigation, according to court records and government officials. And Justin has begun assisting agents with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who hope to use his evidence to bring new charges against an imprisoned child rapist.

Justin himself has found a measure of control over his life. He revealed the details of his secret life to his family, telling them of all the times in the past that he had lied to them. He has sought counseling, kept off drugs, resumed his connection with his church and plans to attend college beginning in January.

In recent weeks, Justin returned to his mother's home in California, fearing that - once his story was public - he might not be able to do so easily. On their final day together, Justin's mother drove him to the airport. Hugging him as they said goodbye, she said that the son she once knew had finally returned.

Then, as tears welled in her eyes, Justin's mother told him that she and his grandmother were proud of him.

Macomb County

GIRL, 12, CHARGED AS SENDER OF THREAT: Terrorism law used; Chippewa Valley kids just glad it's over

December 16, 2005

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO, PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI and STEVE NEAVLING
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

She's 12, she's not a known troublemaker and her grades didn't send up any red flags. But, police said, before she left for a party Saturday, she sent out Internet messages threatening to bomb her Chippewa Valley school.

No evidence, such as weapons, was discovered in her home to show she actually planned to carry out the threat, Clinton Township Police Capt. Bruce Wade said. However, the girl was charged Thursday under a 2002 state law that criminalizes making a terrorist threat. She appears to be the youngest person charged to date under the law.

Her alleged actions created a major scare, leading to increased security and a criminal investigation. And students exhaled with relief when the charges were announced on Wyandot Middle School's loudspeaker at 2 p.m. Thursday.

"I was scared," said eighth-grader Sal Colpitts, 14. "I thought I was going to die."

"This isn't something you mess around with," said Deborah Burns, whose daughter Alexis received the messages. "You can't take this lightly. You can't take chances today."

Alexis said: "I thought it was real at first."

Police did not release the name of the girl who they say confessed to sending the messages. She was charged as a juvenile with using a computer to commit a false report or threat of terrorism and is expected in juvenile court next week.

An adult would face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of the charge. As a juvenile, she could end up under the supervision of the juvenile court until she turns 19.

Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith did not return calls seeking comment beyond what was said in a news release announcing the charges Thursday morning.

"There are very few terrorism charges," said Robert A. Sedler, constitutional law professor at Wayne State University. "I think it's kind of rare because pretty much the feds are going after the real suspected terrorists."

"But here I think it's really not 9/11, it's Columbine" or the potential of a similar attack that prompts prosecutors to use the charge when students threaten to attack their schools, said Sedler, who thought police acted appropriately.

The fact that a girl is accused of making the threats may surprise some.

"I think that people tend to stereotypically think that boys are the only perpetrators of this kind of situation, but that's certainly not the case," said Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists.

"Girls are increasing not only in nonviolent activities" traditionally done by boys "but in violent activities as well."

Chippewa Valley Superintendent Mark Deldin said he would ask district officials to expel the girl from school.

"My recommendation will be to permanently expel any student that makes threats of terrorism or violence to harm others. First and foremost, students have to feel safe in their school."

Deldin said the girl turned herself in Thursday morning. "This was just a very stupid act," he said.

This wasn't the first scare of its kind in the district.

In the summer, Andrew Osantowski, now 18, was convicted of making terrorist threats in fall 2004 against Chippewa Valley High School. Police found a cache of weapons, including bomb-making materials, and Nazi paraphernalia in his home. He was sentenced to up to 4 1/2 years in prison. Osantowski was charged as an adult.

The new threat came Saturday, when someone using the name xxChemicalzxx warned of violence at the school.

"This coming up Monday-Friday I am going to bomb Wyandot Middle School," the sender declared.

The messages warned some students against attending class on those days, stating, "I do care for you."

On Thursday, students described a week of anxiety as they thought about who could be plotting to harm them. Some said they dreaded going to class.

Parents called in absences for about 40% of students Monday, said district spokeswoman Diane Blain. Eight percent to 10% is the average daily number, Blain said.

"When I heard they caught her, I had tears of complete joy and relief in my eyes," said Lisa Lovell, who was among the parents who kept children at home. "We can rest easily now."

Detectives traced the computer activity to the girl's home. She later confessed to sending the messages to her classmates before attending a party with other kids from the school, Capt. Wade said.

"Something that was done 20 years ago as a joke can't be done today," he said.

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Advice for parents

- Parents should check periodically on the Web sites their children have visited, said Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists.

This can extend to entering chat rooms to see what kids have written. And let your children know you intend to check.

"It's important to discuss with your child that from time to time it's going to be important for you as a parent to know what they've been involved in on the Internet," Feinberg said.

Peggy Walsh-Sarnecki

Other student threats.

Metro Detroit cases of student threats against their schools

There have been at least nine such cases in the last 18 months:

June 2004: A 15-year-old boy is placed in juvenile detention for using his cell phone to make a bomb threat against Kennedy Middle School in the Taylor School District.

September 2004: Andrew Osantowski is arrested after threatening a massacre at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township in an Internet chat. Weapons were found in his home, and he was the first person convicted under a 2002 state law that says making a terrorist threat is a criminal offense.

October 2004: An 18-year-old Waterford Mott student is suspended for writing a hit list.

March 2005: A 14-year-old Holly High student from White Lake Township is charged with threatening terrorism after writing a list of people he would kill. He was ordered to undergo therapy and adhere to a strict curfew.

March 2005: Students are sent home when a message threatening to kill certain staff members and students is found on the wall of a boys bathroom in Detroit's Renaissance High.

May 2005: A 16-year-old Warren Mott student from Troy is charged as a juvenile with making a terrorist threat after posting classmates' names on a Web site named "hit list." He was sentenced in August to one year of probation.

November 2005: Two female students from Center Line High are arrested after police say they made a bomb threat against the school.

December 2005: Warner Middle School in Farmington Hills is evacuated because of writing on a wall that alludes to a bomb.

December 2005: A 12-year-old Wyandot Middle School student in Clinton Township is charged with threatening terrorism after saying in an Internet chat that she'd bomb the school.

Source: Free Press library research

Is it terror? School cases raise questions

December 17, 2005

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI and CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Bomb threats were made at two different Macomb County schools this year, but resulted in vastly different charges. In one case, the teens accused of threatening their Center Line high school were charged with misdemeanors. In the other, a 12-year-old girl faces a felony terrorism charge.

The wide range of charges has some parents and lawmakers asking how the same actions can be interpreted as a childish prank or terrorism.

The 12-year-old Clinton Township girl allegedly told friends last week in Internet instant messages that she was going to bomb Wyandot Middle School in the Chippewa Valley School District. She was charged Thursday under a 2002 Michigan law -- written in response to the Sept. 11 attacks -- that makes such threats a felony carrying a penalty of up to 20 years in prison. Just three weeks earlier, authorities in Center Line opted to charge two 15-year-old girls with misdemeanors after police said they called in a bomb threat to Center Line High School. Commenting about cases such as that of the 12-year-old, state Sen. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville, said: "I don't think anyone really thinks they're terrorists." He added that he envisioned the 2002 law being used to fight terrorists, not to charge students.

"We need to figure out how to keep schools safe and how to deal with juvenile behavior that's really dangerous at times," Switalski said.

What charges are filed are generally up to the police who request them, and up to the prosecutors who actually issue the charges.

Law enforcement officials say much thought goes into charging someone with threatening terrorism and that age doesn't exclude accountability.

"Every prosecutor has a wide latitude on how they can charge," Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith said Friday.

Court plays role

Smith said the county's Juvenile Court would determine the punishment in the Wyandot Middle School bomb threat. If the girl is convicted, he said, he doubts she'll serve time in the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center.

He defended his decision to charge her with terrorism, saying her alleged actions had a serious effect on the community.

"If I don't take a serious stance on this, then who will?" he said.

Clinton Township Police Capt. Bruce Wade, who headed the criminal investigation, said police kept in close contact with the prosecutor's office while pursuing the charge against the girl.

"Ultimately, they're the ones who make the final decision," Wade said Friday.

Much of the reasoning for it rested on the fear it caused parents, students and school officials. About 40% of Wyandot's students stayed home the day after the threat.

The charge also stems from how the threat disrupted daily operations at the school, such as leading to backpack checks and canine searches, Wade said.

"It wouldn't be fair to say, 'Well, this person really didn't mean it.' There would have to be some kind of thought behind it to create this kind of havoc," he said.

"We put the case together and the chips fall where they do. And obviously, someone who is 12 years old, you don't want to see their life ruined over this either."

Dangerous words

Most adults can think back to a time when, frustrated with a classmate or teacher, they or a friend uttered something such as, "I could kill her," or, "I should blow this place up."

Thanks to a combination of the Internet, the Columbine massacre and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, what was just stupid talk 20 years ago is now against the law. That has parents worried about the consequences for their children.

Lynn Anderson of Clinton Township said she talks to her children, ages 15 and 16, about the consequences that can come from a careless remark.

"I just know how kids are, when they're fooling around, making cracks," she said. "Kids are just kids, and a felony charge against a 12-year-old?"

But other parents said that the potential danger warrants a strong response.

"The kids now, especially if you're a 12-year-old, you know what's been happening," said Kelly Kohut of Oxford, who has 14- and 16-year-old children. "These schools have to have consequences. You have to have zero tolerance. You can't know who's kidding and who isn't."

Officials took a tough stance with Andrew Osantowski, now 18, who was the first person convicted under the law for making terrorist threats in fall 2004 against Chippewa Valley High School, which is in the same district as Wyandot.

Police found a cache of weapons, including bomb-making materials, and Nazi paraphernalia in Osantowski's home. He was charged as an adult and was sentenced to up to 4 1/2 years in prison.

"The people in the Chippewa Valley community are hypersensitive to school violence and we take that into account," said Smith.

Seeking a solution

But is the law the right solution? Glenn Stutzky, a clinical instructor in Michigan State University's School of Social Work, said charging kids as terrorists doesn't solve the problem.

"This law has lowered the threshold to where prosecutors are going to catch a lot of kids if they use this law as a threshold for adolescents," Stutzky said.

"I find that in most of these cases, the kids have been a victim of harassment or threats or maybe they've been bullied," he said. "What they're trying to do is deal with the imbalance of power."

"They don't have in mind to overthrow a government. I really think this law needs to be clarified," he added.

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel said he hopes the terrorism case helps other children grasp the depth of the consequences for making threats -- serious or not.

"They realize: 'Holy cow. This is what could happen to me,'" he said. "It's pretty serious stuff."

Contact **PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI** at 586-469-4681 or pwalsh@freepress.com.

Guidance needed

- Experts say parents must talk to their children about the serious consequences of even joking remarks that could be construed as threats.
And they should go back and talk to their kids again and again.
Parents also need to make clear to their children that help is available if they feel bullied, harassed or threatened.
Many parents think it's important to allow kids more freedom.

"I think that's a classic error, that some parents want to give their emerging adolescent some freedom and space," said Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists.

The parts of the brain controlling impulses and decision-making are underdeveloped in teenagers. At the same time, the areas of the brain controlling emotions are on overdrive. The result: Sound judgment isn't always a teenage asset. That means parents have to maintain control.

Feinberg advises parents to treat the Internet the same way they treat other aspects of their child's social life. Just as parents ask where their child is going, they should also make it clear to the child that they are going to check on Internet roaming. It's even fair to go into chat rooms and see who their children are talking to and what they're talking about.

"Don't buy into the notion that because your child is a teenager, you don't have the right and the responsibility to stay involved in their lives," Feinberg said.

By Peggy Walsh-Sarnecki

Judge pens book on teen violence

Monday, December 19, 2005

SCOTT DAVIS
THE SAGINAW NEWS

As they enter the courtroom in handcuffs one by one, M.T. Thompson Jr. sees teenage gang members as both a symptom of a city careening out of control and its hope for the future. The Saginaw County district judge also sees a reflection of himself.

As a black teenager on the city's East Side in the late 1960s, Thompson flirted with ganglike violence -- as many youths did -- but his father, a preacher, pushed him on to college and eventually law school.

Armed with a book he penned, Thompson says he is waging a different battle to save Saginaw teens tempted by crime.

"I was called to the judiciary to make a difference," Thompson said. "I tell (youths), 'Your struggle was my struggle. My success can be your success.' "

Thompson has co-written a workbook, "Making Choices and Facing Consequences: Manchild in the Promise Land," that he hopes mid-Michigan schools and nonprofits will introduce to teens. Assisting him with the 18-month project was his daughter, Monica R. Nuckolls, a professor of law at Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing.

The book introduces teens to several real-life scenarios -- some drawn from people whom Thompson knew from childhood -- to show the consequences of gang life.

In a series of questions after the scenarios, Thompson asks teens whether the protagonist would have fared better by making more productive choices.

The workbook presentation builds on several appearances he has made at Saginaw-area middle schools in recent years.

"The crisis we face is among boys. It's among men," said Thompson, adding that part of the problem is a lack of employment opportunities. "Kids have to know how to stay out of harm's way and risky places."

For Thompson, the crisis among young black males in Saginaw is undeniable. He reels off several statistics:

Between 1980 and 2000, black men in Michigan went to prison at 13 times the rate they attended college, resulting in more black men in prison than college.

In 2002, nearly 55 percent of the state's prison population was black, although blacks represent only 14 percent of Michigan's population.

According to a recent national survey, Saginaw had the ninth highest homicide rate in the country.

One reason why so many more black men than whites end up in prison is they don't understand their constitutional rights, Thompson said.

He hopes to remedy that with a section in his book that teaches teenagers their Miranda rights, which include a right to remain silent and to have an attorney present during questioning.

Another section describes each step of the criminal justice process, from arrest through conviction.

"Everybody should understand how the criminal justice system works," Thompson said. "Part of the reason people don't have confidence in the criminal justice system is because they don't understand how it works."

He designed another section to teach parents about drugs and drug paraphernalia to help them spot signs of drug abuse in their children.

Published by Bloomington, Ind.-based Authorhouse, the book is available by dialing (888) 280-7715 or going online at www.authorhouse.com. The students' edition costs \$29.95, while a teacher's edition costs \$49.95.

So far, Thompson said his use of the workbook with groups of middle school students is encouraging.

"We went to see if it engaged them, and it did," Thompson said. "The kids were easier to reach than I thought. The kids had never thought long-term."

Scott Davis is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9665.

Lives Lost As Vaccine Programs Face Delays

Efforts to Get Medicine To Poor Children Falter

By Justin Gillis Washington Post Staff Writer

Monday, December 19, 2005; Page A01

Companies have developed two vaccines that theoretically could save the lives of several million children over the next decade, but efforts to get them to the poor countries that need them most are lagging.

One vaccine, which protects against a life-threatening form of pneumonia, has been available to children in the United States for five years and has had a dramatic impact on disease here. The other, a vaccine that protects against a deadly form of diarrhea, is poised for a rollout soon among middle-income countries in Latin America.

The vaccines are the subject of special programs designed to speed them to poorer countries. With the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation spending billions of dollars to improve global health and encouraging efforts to solve long-standing problems, excited doctors have been trying to create a system that would get such vaccines to rich and poor alike at the same time.

But the efforts have faltered amid a dizzying array of snafus, misjudgments and business difficulties. One company cannot produce enough vaccine, and studies needed to support widespread use of another have been slowed by behind-the-scenes squabbling. The problems have proved so vexing that the vaccines are expected to take an additional three to five years to reach the poorest villages.

Historically, vaccine companies rarely focused on lower-income markets and would not scale their manufacturing plants to produce excess vaccine for them. Life-saving shots would trickle down to poor countries after decades on the market, costing many lives.

To break that cycle, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, a disease-fighting coalition in Geneva, selected the pneumonia and diarrhea vaccines for special emphasis three years ago. The alliance of governments and organizations, known as GAVI, is closely tied to the World Health Organization but receives much of its funding from the Gates Foundation in Seattle.

In establishing the program to accelerate a vaccine against the diarrhea-causing intestinal germ called rotavirus, organizers said in a statement, they aimed to ensure "that rotavirus vaccine is available to children in developing countries at the same time as those living in the developed world."

That is now all but certain not to happen, nor has it happened with the pneumonia vaccine. Some experts see the problems as a harbinger of bigger trouble to come, as the Gates Foundation funds development of vaccines for malaria and tuberculosis that could save tens of millions of lives but might face similar deployment hurdles.

Prevnar, the pneumonia vaccine sold by Wyeth, a drugmaker in Madison, N.J., has had a sharp impact in the United States. Though expensive, it has been a runaway success, with sales topping \$1 billion a year -- a first in the history of vaccines.

The company initially underestimated demand even in rich countries and has struggled to expand a complex manufacturing procedure. Wyeth says it is working on a version of the vaccine that it

hopes to sell to poor countries at reduced prices, but many public-health experts believe the supply situation will not be solved until new manufacturers come into the market in several years.

Wyeth's critical supply decisions had already been made by the time GAVI funded a \$30 million program at Johns Hopkins University nearly three years ago to accelerate introduction of Prevnar or a similar vaccine to poor countries.

The director of that project, Orin Levine, has worked with Wyeth to refine its long-term plans but has focused mainly on laying the groundwork for a rollout in poor countries once competing vaccines are licensed. Levine's efforts have received high marks, even though doctors are disappointed to see lives lost to a vaccine-preventable disease. The germ in question, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, kills an estimated 1.6 million people a year, about half of them children in poor countries.

The case of rotavirus vaccine is more troubling to many experts, for a plentiful vaccine that became available last year is not being widely used.

Most people have never heard of rotavirus, but every child in the world contracts it early in life. In such places as the United States, some children are hospitalized with rotavirus diarrhea, but they get good care and do not die. In countries with poor health systems, children often progress to catastrophic dehydration and an estimated 440,000 die of rotavirus every year.

Reading that statistic was one of the things that drew Bill Gates, the Microsoft Corp. founder, into global health issues in the 1990s. "I thought, 'Rotavirus? -- I've never even heard of it,' " Gates recalled in a speech in May. " 'How could I never have heard of something that kills half a million children every year?' "

Further study convinced him that many millions of poor children die of preventable diseases.

One of the Gates Foundation's first big moves was to grab underused vaccines, such as one against a serious liver virus, and make them more widely available, a strategy that is on track to save millions of lives.

Public-health doctors wanted to go further, proving that new vaccines can be made available worldwide as soon as they are ready. It seemed for a while that rotavirus vaccine would be the case in point.

Past experience suggested potential safety problems with a vaccine, so GlaxoSmithKline PLC of London, the drug company furthest ahead with a new product, launched huge trials in Latin America. Merck & Co. of Whitehouse Station, N.J., is also working on a vaccine.

Heartened by statements from GAVI about a quick rollout, Glaxo's biologicals division in Belgium built a plant able to supply much of the world with its vaccine, Rotarix.

Even with a manufacturer willing to sell to poor countries, public-health doctors still have a formidable list of tasks to introduce a vaccine. Many health ministers will not embrace a new vaccine until they see studies convincing them that the disease in their country is severe and that the vaccine is cost-effective in combating it. Moreover, money must be identified to help poor countries pay for the vaccine.

The Rotavirus Vaccine Program, similar to the Hopkins program on pneumonia, was set up in 2003 to tackle those problems. People close to the situation said there has been considerable tension behind closed doors between its managers and GlaxoSmithKline. Executives at the company's biologicals division said they had difficulty getting the program to commit to funding and a strategy for tests in Africa and Asia.

"We're a bit frustrated," said Deborah E. Myers, director of external and government affairs at GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals. "We've asked about what we need to do to supply information to make the case. We could never get them to make a decision."

John Wecker, a former pharmaceutical executive who directs the Rotavirus Vaccine Program, acknowledged vigorous discussions. "I think it's fair to say that we've struggled sometimes with the manufacturers" about how to proceed, he said. But the main problem, he said, was not any lethargy in his program but the sheer difficulty of setting up complex research in poor countries. Key studies are finally underway but are not close to being finished.

Christopher J. Elias, president of the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health, a Seattle organization that houses and oversees the rotavirus program, said he thought it was making progress. "In terms of whether it's working, the only honest answer is that it's too soon to tell," he said.

All parties involved said it had become evident that two or three years of groundwork is not enough to accelerate a vaccine, and one lesson is that regional studies need to be planned far ahead. "Start earlier," Wecker declared. Charities funded by Gates that are developing vaccines for tuberculosis and malaria are already applying this finding.

It is clear that Glaxo created some delays itself: To hasten a rollout in poor countries, the company first licensed its vaccine in Mexico. But problems with that country's drug regulators slowed the World Health Organization in declaring the vaccine safe and effective for global use - a crucial step.

Julian Lob-Levyt, executive secretary of GAVI, emphasized the experimental nature of the rotavirus and pneumococcal acceleration programs that his group created. "We need to be open and self-critical and see how we can move faster," he said.

Merck and Glaxo are expected to enter U.S. and European markets with rotavirus vaccines as early as next year. Merck recently cut a deal with the Rotavirus Vaccine Program to pursue research in poor countries, but the studies will not begin until late next year. People in the field estimated that it will be at least three to five years before the new vaccines begin to reach the children who need them most.

"It was the industry that was being chastised a decade ago," said Steven Drew, a vice president at Glaxo. "We've done our bit, and the problem is still not fixed."

Some public-health doctors, although regretting that the original goal will not be met, urged a sense of perspective, noting that the vaccine might reach poor children just a few years after it reaches those in rich countries. "If we can cut the lag time from 30 years to a decade or less, that's 20 years of lives saved," said Nils Daulaire, president of the Global Health Council, an advocacy group in White River Junction, Vt.

The sentiment, however valid, is a measure of the degree to which the public-health world has become accustomed to death on a mass scale.

If the rotavirus and pneumonia vaccines take three more years to reach poor countries, 3.7 million children will have died of the diseases by then. That is 3,397 children for every day's delay.

Drug Changes Are Looming, and Providers Seek Answers

By ROBERT PEAR

Published: December 19, 2005

The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 - Two weeks before the start of the Medicare prescription drug benefit, pharmacists and nursing homes are desperately trying to find out who will pay for the medicines taken by hundreds of thousands of their residents.

The new law relies on private insurers to deliver drug benefits to older Americans. About two-thirds of the 1.5 million residents of nursing homes are participants in both Medicare and Medicaid. The government has randomly assigned them to private drug plans, regardless of their needs.

In many cases, nursing home officials said, they do not know to which plans their patients have been assigned. As a result, they do not know who will pay the bills or what drugs will be covered. Each plan has its own list of approved drugs, known as a formulary.

Becky A. Kurtz, the state-appointed ombudswoman for nursing home residents in Georgia, said: "We see a lot of confusion and a very steep learning curve for nursing home residents and employees. Many residents are not covered for all their medications under the plan to which they have been assigned."

By contrast, Ms. Kurtz said, "under the state Medicaid program, these residents have had nearly all their drugs covered."

Nursing home residents take an average of eight to nine medications a day.

The Bush administration said it had sent letters to people entitled to both Medicare and Medicaid, announcing that Medicaid coverage of their prescription drugs would end on Jan. 1.

Paul Baldwin, director of the Long Term Care Pharmacy Alliance, which represents providers of prescription drug services, said, "Nursing home operators and pharmacies are desperately trying to figure out where these dual-eligible individuals have been assigned."

To obtain the information, nursing homes can submit online queries to a federal Web site or they can send a list of beneficiaries by fax to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The agency had originally said it would "fax back" the information within three days. But on Wednesday, Medicare officials said that they had changed the procedure and would send the information to nursing homes within 10 business days.

A Medicare pharmacist, Gregory R. Dill, said the agency had received "an overwhelming volume of requests" for such information.

In New York, nursing home residents on Medicare and Medicaid have been randomly assigned to 15 drug plans, according to the State Health Department.

Dr. Robert A. Zorowitz, chief medical officer at the Hebrew Home for the Aged in the Bronx, said he had tried to obtain information on residents from the Medicare Web site.

"It worked at some times for some patients, but not for others," Dr. Zorowitz said. "It's inconsistent."

A federal contractor, NDCHealth, is loading information onto the Web site of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, known as C.M.S.

A spokesman for the company, Robert P. Borchert, said: "We are waiting for data from C.M.S. We don't have a full set of data. The information is there for some beneficiaries and not yet for others. It's still in a test mode."

A spokesman for the Medicare agency, Gary R. Karr, said all the information would be available to homes before Dec. 31.

Lorraine Tarnove, executive director of the American Medical Directors Association, which represents doctors who care for nursing home residents, said doctors needed the information as soon as possible.

"In the next two weeks," Ms. Tarnove said, "doctors have to review the drug regimens of almost all nursing home residents and rewrite the prescriptions to comply with Medicare drug plan formularies. There could be a dozen plans with a dozen formularies in one nursing home."

Nancy B. O'Connor, regional administrator of the Medicare agency in Philadelphia, said nursing home residents had several important protections.

"They can switch plans at any time," Ms. O'Connor said, "and they will have no premiums, deductibles or co-payments."

In addition, drug plans are supposed to have procedures to ensure a smooth transition, perhaps by covering a patient's current drugs for a few months.

But Thomas R. Clark, policy director at the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, whose 7,000 members specialize in drug care for the elderly, said, "We have had great difficulty finding out what the transition policies are."

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3B

Monday

DECEMBER 19, 2005

Update: Custody bill likely to become law

CONTINUED FROM 1B

Measure would protect military parents' rights

Michigan courts would no longer be able to consider a parent's absence for service in the National Guard or Reserve in determining custody cases under a bill headed to Gov. Jennifer Granholm's desk.

House Bill 5100, given final approval by the state House last week, was prompted by the case of Army National Guard Spc. Joe McNeilly of Grand Ledge, who says he lost joint custody of his son because of his 15-month tour in Iraq.

McNeilly, 33, has been fighting the Ingham County Friend of the Court since he returned in March to regain 50 percent custody of his 10-year-old son, Joey.

The court has refused to reverse an order McNeilly signed giving Joey's mother full custody while he was gone. The courts says the mother established a custodial environment for the boy while McNeilly was away.

The boy's mother says the case is about McNeilly's parenting skills, not his service.

Granholm is expected to sign the bill.

Michigan Report

December 16, 2005

COURTS: CHILD SUPPORT, CUSTODY **NOT ONE IN THE SAME**

Proceedings for child support are not lumped into complaints for child custody when jurisdiction is in question, the Court of Appeals said in a decision released Friday.

The Uniform Child-Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act, which Michigan enacted in 2001, mandates that when there is a question of jurisdiction in a case where two parents live in different states, Michigan courts may not claim jurisdiction if child custody action has already commenced in another state.

In the case of Krista Fisher against her child's father, Shannon Belcher, (*Fisher v. Belcher*, COA docket No. 268083) Ms. Fisher claimed that after she moved to Michigan, this state became a more convenient venue for proceedings on child support and custody issues. She filed a motion for custody in Michigan in September 2004, two months after relocating from Missouri. Mr. Belcher filed a request for custody in a Missouri court in October 2004.

Questions over which court had jurisdiction ensued.

The court, in an opinion by Judge Pat Donofrio and signed by Judges Brian Zahra and Kirsten Kelly, affirmed the trial court which said the state of Missouri retained custody because Mr. Belcher filed a motion for child custody in that state before Ms. Fisher filed the same in Michigan in January 2005.

In her appeal of the lower court decision, Ms. Fisher contended that a determination of child support would have necessitated a determination of custody, therefore her original motion to obtain child support could be viewed as a proceeding of custody.

The judges said the legislative intent of the jurisdiction law plainly separates child support actions from custody actions and courts can't deviate from unambiguous language in the law.

"If the Legislature had intended to include a child support complaint as giving rise to a child custody proceeding, it would have chosen to include the phrase 'child support complaint' in the statute," Judge Donofrio wrote.

Other factors considered in questions of jurisdiction are whether one parent has a significant connection to Michigan, whether the child has been in the state for at least six

months and whether the other state has accepted jurisdiction. Judges said Ms. Fisher's case passed none of these tests.

Coalition: Rental housing often not affordable

Friday, December 16, 2005

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS and THE SAGINAW NEWS

WASHINGTON -- The cost of rental housing has increased faster than wages, making it increasingly difficult for low-income families to afford even modest apartments, a report shows. "The disparity between what people earn, and what even modest rental housing costs, grows larger each year," said Sheila Crowley, president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. The coalition, which advocates for more affordable housing, issues a report each year tracking rental costs in every county in the country.

The coalition says families should spend no more 30 percent of their incomes on housing and utilities, a standard recognized by many housing experts.

But the coalition said it could not find a single county in the United States where a full-time worker making minimum wage could afford a one-bedroom apartment.

In reality, the report found, many low-income families spend a far larger share of their incomes on housing.

Saginaw County has 21,045 renter households among 80,430 total, a ratio of 26 percent -- the same as Michigan's as a whole.

The coalition reports that the average income in a Saginaw County rental household is \$24,532 -- less than half of the county's \$53,050 average for an owner-occupied home -- and that fair market rents are \$590 for a two-bedroom apartment and \$707 for a three-bedroom unit.

Based on those figures, the two-bedroom cost falls below the 30 percent standard but the three-bedroom fees exceeds the rule of thumb.

Saginaw County has higher poverty than the state as a whole, but housing costs are more affordable. Statewide fair market rents are \$724 for two bedrooms and \$896 for three bedrooms.

The coalition reports that with the minimum wage at \$5.15 per hour and with Saginaw County's average renter wage at \$9.70, many households or single parents rely on multiple incomes.

Hawaii is the state with the most expensive rental costs, followed by California, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York. California also had eight of the 10 most expensive counties for rental housing, led by Marin County, just north of San Francisco.

West Virginia had the most affordable rents, followed by Arkansas, North Dakota, Alabama and Mississippi.

Nationally, families have to make an average of \$15.78 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment, while spending no more than 30 percent of their earnings on housing costs. That is up from \$15.37 a year ago.

The federal minimum wage, at \$5.15 an hour, was last increased in 1997. Fifteen states have minimum wages higher than the federal level.

The report says the low-income housing market will be grim for many victims of Hurricane Katrina. A federal judge ruled Monday that a federal program that is putting up tens of thousands of Katrina victims in hotels must be extended by a month, to Feb. 7.

The housing coalition analyzed data from the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to track wages and rents.

The report also found that the costs of heating fuel and utilities increased by 13 percent in the past year, contributing to much of the increase in renter costs.

"There are a high percentage of people that don't get by," said Chris Bender of Housing California, which advocates for more low-income housing.

Many low-income people are forced to choose between paying rent, buying medicine, or providing books for their children, Bender said.

"How do people like that have holidays?" Bender asked. "They probably don't."

Posted 12/15/2005 10:57 PM Updated 12/15/2005 11:15 PM

Thousands of facilities go without oversight

By Peter Eisler, USA TODAY

MOUNT MORRIS TOWNSHIP, Mich. — The first time fire inspectors looked at the assisted-living home on Coldwater Road, a pre-dawn fire had just gutted it.

A wheelchair sits near an unlicensed assisted-living home in Michigan in which a fire killed five people in 2002.

Lisa Dejong, The Flint Journal

The blaze killed five of the 12 elderly and disabled residents inside the 1,500-square-foot house, which had no working smoke alarms, no sprinklers and no state license, authorities say.

The burned bodies of four women in their 70s and 80s still lay in their beds. The remains of another lay beneath the dining room table, where the woman had been sleeping on the floor.

"We never even knew this place existed until we showed up and started pulling people out," Fire Chief Chris Hall says of the 2002 fire. "This place was an accident waiting to happen. ... It seems like anyone can open up their house and call it 'assisted living.' "

Across the nation, thousands of assisted-living facilities operate without licenses and the oversight that comes with them. And even when facilities are forced to meet state or local fire safety standards, a USA TODAY investigation shows, the requirements often are weak or rife with loopholes. That makes it easy for operators to go without smoke alarms, sprinklers and other safeguards.

Unlike nursing homes, assisted-living facilities are not subject to federal fire safety standards. That leaves state and local authorities to set the rules.

In many cases, those rules fall far short of where fire safety experts and advocates say they need to be. Assisted-living facilities typically provide 24-hour, supervised care for people who can't handle all the tasks of daily living but do not require the full-time medical care offered by nursing homes.

With more than a million elderly and disabled people now in assisted-living facilities, the consequences of poor fire safety rules are considerable — and deadly.

A USA TODAY analysis of federal fire data, news accounts and public records shows at least two fires a day in the nation's assisted-living facilities, which include everything from converted private homes serving a handful of people to large, supervised high-rises and apartment complexes housing hundreds. About once a month, one of those fires proves deadly.

By comparison, nursing homes average about a half-dozen fatal fires a year; hospitals and hospices average about one, according to data from the National Fire Protection Association, a non-partisan research group.

In 2003 and 2004, at least 30 people died in fires at assisted-living facilities, the newspaper's analysis shows.

"If you look at who's living in assisted living, the necessity for more stringent (fire) codes becomes apparent — they're people who are relatively infirm, not necessarily alert, not necessarily able to move around well, and they're spending the night there," says Rick Harris, director of health provider standards for the Alabama Department of Public Health.

"To allow facilities to self-regulate on this issue is ridiculous," he says.

Alabama is one of few states that set rigorous fire safety standards, including a sprinkler requirement, for all assisted-living facilities. It hasn't had a fatal fire in an assisted-living facility in a decade.

"Most people who patronize (assisted living) are totally dependent on government regulators to make sure those facilities meet appropriate codes," says Harris, a former president of the Association of Health Facility Survey Agencies, a national group representing state health care regulators. "It's the rare consumer who is going to ask whether a place has sprinklers."

Assisted-living industry officials acknowledge the difficulties consumers face in finding a facility that's safe.

David Kylo, director of the National Center for Assisted Living, an industry group, notes that thousands of assisted-living facilities nationwide have excellent fire safety features. But as a practical matter, he adds, states will continue to take disparate approaches in regulating assisted-living providers. That means consumers need to do their homework.

"From the consumer side, if I were looking to move my mom into any type of community, one of the things I'm going to look for are sprinklers and smoke detectors and what plan do they have to get people out if something were to occur," Kylo says.

No sprinklers required

ATTEMPTS AT FEDERAL STANDARDS FALL SHORT

By Peter Eisler, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - Why doesn't Congress pass a law that sets fire safety standards for all assisted-living facilities? Because it lacks legal leverage.

Federal officials can regulate nursing homes because the homes get most of their revenue from payments under Medicare and Medicaid, the federal insurance programs for the elderly, poor and disabled.

So the government sets fire safety standards for the industry, and it can enforce them by denying payments to facilities that don't comply. Assisted-living facilities generally don't get federal dollars under Medicare and Medicaid.

A 1976 federal law, the Keys Amendment, requires states to "certify" each year that they enforce meaningful safety standards for facilities, such as assisted living, that care for people on Social Security retirement or disability benefits.

To give the law teeth, the Senate added language allowing the government to withhold Social Security benefits to people in states that don't make that certification. It was a punish-the-victims approach that several of the law's sponsors opposed, and successive administrations have found it unworkable.

"We don't invoke that (penalty)," says Social Security Administration spokesman Mark Lassiter. But "states still have to send us their certifications."

Six states have not filed 2005 certifications, which were due Oct. 1.

Congress has considered bills to give tax breaks and other incentives to assisted-living providers that add sprinklers or other fire protections. None has been adopted.

Manuel Burciaga picked an assisted-living center in the wrong Arizona community.

According to Bob Kahn, an assistant fire chief in Phoenix, firefighters found Burciaga, 74, on the floor of his bedroom in a blistering haze of smoke and 900-degree heat at The Lodge at 14th Street. The licensed assisted-living facility was home for 40 residents. A man in an adjacent room set fire to a mattress, then fled in his wheelchair as flames tore through their suite, according to the police report. Burciaga and three others who couldn't escape were rushed to the hospital. Burciaga died from severe burns and smoke inhalation; the others survived.

The October 2004 fire was the second of the year at The Lodge — someone had accidentally lit a mattress on fire while smoking eight months earlier. Built in the late 1960s, the brick building had no sprinkler system. By law, none was required.

Sprinklers "probably would have made the difference" in containing the fire and giving firefighters time to save Burciaga and his neighbors, Kahn says. The state of Arizona sets few fire safety standards in assisted living, leaving the responsibility primarily to counties and municipalities. Some, including Phoenix, demand sprinklers in new facilities, but do not require older ones such as The Lodge to retrofit. Other communities, such as nearby Goodyear, require sprinklers in all facilities.

Kahn says Phoenix's fire codes give assisted-living providers too much "wiggle room" to avoid installing sprinklers and other safeguards. "It's a big concern," he says, because more and more residents are reaching the age where they can't escape fire themselves. In most buildings, "80% to 90% of the occupants can get out on their own. In these places, it's more like one in three."

Nationwide, four states set no fire safety rules whatsoever for assisted-living facilities; about a dozen others have rules that cover some — but not all — facilities. Only one — Colorado — requires that facilities without sprinklers disclose that fact to prospective residents.

In many parts of the country, the scattershot approach to regulating fire safety has yielded a mish-mash of rules from one community to the next.

Tucson Fire Marshal Dan Uthe, a panelist in a 2003 national conference on fire safety in assisted living, says the nation's growing reliance on the industry makes lawmakers reluctant to impose costly — and uniform — fire safety mandates. "If you require sprinklers retroactively, are the costs going to drive some facilities out of business and displace these elderly people?" he asks. He says sprinkler installation can cost tens, even hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on a facility's size. "It's a real concern."

But unlike nursing homes, where fees for most services are limited by federal Medicare and Medicaid rules, assisted-living facilities generally can adjust rates to recoup the costs of installing sprinklers and other fire protections. And in states such as Alabama, where all assisted-living facilities must have sprinklers, there's no evidence that facilities have been forced out of business.

A question of licensing

At the home that burned to the ground in Michigan, operator Esther Johnson took in all sorts of residents, including at least two with dementia so advanced that they couldn't live on their own, according to fire investigators and friends and relatives of victims. She also provided some services that typically would require a state license for adult foster care, the term Michigan uses for smaller assisted-living-type homes. Some of her charges

needed wheelchairs and couldn't bathe, eat, get out of bed or take their medication without help, according to police and fire reports.

But Johnson had given up her license to run an adult foster care home in 1996 after an investigation by the state's then-Department of Social Services found her to be "totally disabled due to insanity/imbecility," state records show. Shortly after, she opened the unlicensed home that burned in Mount Morris Township.

The fire started just after 5 a.m. in a bedroom in a converted garage. Investigators later concluded that the thermostat on an electric heater was disabled — the home's furnace was broken — and it ignited a bedcover in the room used by Eloise Caldwell, an 88-year-old retired social worker and adult education teacher. She and the four other elderly woman who died all were listed by investigators as "physically disabled."

Caldwell's daughter, Darla Caldwell Broden, put her mother in the home because bouts of depression and the onset of dementia had left her unable to take her medication on her own. "I didn't know at the time whether it was licensed," she says, noting that she was referred to the home by a social worker.

"My mother was clean and well fed there, she seemed to get good care, and I don't think I ever thought about the safety issues," Broden says. "They need to have standards, some type of regulation. ... The safety stuff doesn't cross your mind until the day after someplace has had a fire."

Johnson, the operator, did not reopen the ruined home. USA TODAY could not locate her.

Deborah Wood, head of adult foster care licensing for the Michigan Department of Human Services, says she does not know whether Johnson's home should have had a license — and the fire safety checks that come with it. If the residents required significant supervision and care, she says, a license would have been required. But the department never investigated to see if that was the case.

"We have no legal definition of assisted living in Michigan, so basically anyone can call themselves assisted living," she says.

The department does not know how many unlicensed facilities are operating in the state, she adds, because it only investigates facilities if it gets a complaint. "We don't find out about them unless somebody tells us."

No one ever alerted the department about the home in Mount Morris Township, she says.

Enforcement often lax

Even when assisted-living facilities are licensed and subject to safety standards, there's often no guarantee that they'll be well protected when fire strikes. Enforcement often is lax. And some care providers slip through gaps in state and local regulations.

Michigan is among at least a dozen states that leave fire safety checks at many assisted-living homes to adult care specialists who are trained primarily to evaluate the quality of care a facility provides. The state has about 50 of those evaluators, and they receive additional training in fire safety. But each year, they're responsible for inspecting more than 2,000 assisted-living operations across the state, and in the past three years, the number of evaluators has shrunk by almost 40%.

Patient advocates say the problem is common: Many states have cut their enforcement operations sharply as part of efforts to avert budget crises.

"It's a nationwide problem," says Lori Smetanka, director of the National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center, a federally funded group set up to represent and support state ombudsman programs for the elderly and disabled. "Staff (for enforcement) are being cut across the board, and there just aren't as many people available to do inspections."

Yet leaving inspections to fire marshals doesn't necessarily solve the problem. In a survey of state fire marshals by USA TODAY and the National Association of State Fire Marshals, 15 reported that budget and staffing constraints have hampered their ability to keep tabs on assisted-living facilities.

Several state and local fire marshals also said in interviews that they have run into some regulatory confusion when trying to enforce fire safety standards in facilities regulated mainly by state health departments.

In Florida, for example, state licensing rules allow assisted-living providers to schedule their own fire safety inspections with local fire marshals.

In October, an electrical fire struck a St. Petersburg assisted-living home eight months past due for an annual inspection. Investigators later found an array of safety violations — locked fire exit doors, cigarette butts in non-smoking areas, broken alarms. St. Petersburg Deputy Fire Marshal Rick Feinberg says it was "lucky" no one was killed. Tragedy was averted, he says, because the fire started just after everyone woke up.

Feinberg says a subsequent investigation by fire officials determined that 17 of the city's 50 assisted-living facilities were overdue for fire inspections, some by almost a year.

Data analysis by Paul Overberg; research by Michael Hartigan, Susan O'Brian and William Risser

Deal set in Katrina fund scam

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, December 17, 2005

By Paul Janczewski

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Gwendolyn D. Jones told officials at the American Red Cross Genesee-Lapeer Chapter she had lost everything when she evacuated her Gulf Coast home in Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina.

So on Sept. 14, they handed her a check for \$1,565 to help her and her four children - only to be told later by an anonymous tipster that Jones, 36, had been living in Flint for about a year and used the national disaster to scam the local relief fund.

Flint police Sgt. James Peterson called her actions "outrageous." And on Friday, Jones, 36, waived her preliminary examination and agreed to plead guilty to false pretenses over \$1,000 but less than \$20,000, a 5-year felony.

"There's only so much money to go around to these people who were affected (by Hurricane Katrina)," said Peterson, "and someone could have gone without because of her actions."

Flint police discovered that Jones had been collecting \$241 per month from the Family Independence Agency, and said she has had previous legal problems.

Under terms of the deal, prosecutors agreed not to charge Jones, a convicted felon, as an habitual offender, which would have added time to any sentence she receives.

Jones also is required to make restitution to the local agency.

Flint District Court Judge William H. Crawford II scheduled a Jan. 9 arraignment before Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille, where she will enter her plea and admit her actions.

Attorney Harrell Milhouse, who represented Jones in court, said after the hearing the case "isn't as bad as it looks."

He said she did live in Mississippi at one time, but mistakenly believed she was entitled to relief. Peterson said Jones had been living in Flint for at least 11 months; Hurricane Katrina hit this past September.

Court records indicate Jones has a January show-cause hearing in Central District Court where she must pay about \$191 stemming from a June 22, 2001 misdemeanor charge of attempted embezzlement of money and merchandise while employed at the J.C. Penney store in Courtland Center.

Police and prosecutors said she embezzled \$1,232 while working at the store. While restitution has been paid, Jones faces 45 days in jail if the remaining fines and costs are not paid next month.

Court records also indicate Jones is on probation from a larceny conviction in Baton Rouge, La. Jones, who remains free on a \$5,000 personal bond, was born in Flint, but lived in Mississippi for 10-15 years, court record indicate. She is on a maternity leave from the Family Dollar store. Peterson said Jones had a Mississippi state identification card when she went to the Red Cross.

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in September, killing more than 1,000 people, flooding New Orleans and inflicting heavy damage on parts of Mississippi and Alabama.

Jones told Peterson she "thought it was OK" to obtain relief funds.

Ken Vavra, executive director of the local Red Cross, said he was relieved the case is resolved and hopes Jones repays the cash.

Nationwide, there have been 261 cases of people trying to defraud relief agencies in connection with the disaster, Vavra said.

More than \$1.8 billion has been donated nationwide to assist those victims, Vavra said. The local Red Cross chapter has raised nearly \$1.2 million in hurricane relief donations, Vavra said, and has spent \$119,000 helping more than 165 people.

"History shows that during episodic disasters such as Hurricane Katrina there are always some who will try to take advantage of those less fortunate," Vavra said.

"We have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to fraud."

Partner benefits extended while court mulls issue

Saturday, December 17, 2005

Gazette staff reports

The domestic partners of City of Kalamazoo employees will continue to be entitled to benefits until June 30 after a decision by Kalamazoo City Manager Ken Collard announced on Friday. The benefits were to end on Dec. 31 in response to an opinion by State Attorney General Mike Cox that found domestic-partner benefits violated Proposal 2, which voters approved in November 2004 to define marriage as being between one man and one woman.

The matter now is on appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeal, which has indicated it will consider the matter soon.

“My decision reflects the expectation that within the next few months the Court of Appeals will issue a ruling that will address the legality of such benefits,” Collard said in a printed release.

“Once that ruling is received, we can more properly assess our position.”

Loaves and fishes

Monday, December 19, 2005

By JERRY NUNN
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

HALE - What do you get when you cross a Roman Catholic, a Methodist and a Lutheran? If you are in Western Iosco County, you get a small miracle - the Hale Area Fish, a local charity organization - thanks to a dedicated team of church leaders who guide the generous enterprise. Gus Franczek, priest of St. Pius X Catholic Church; the Rev. Pat England, of Hale United Methodist Church, and Dean Muhle, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, all of Hale, serve as the charity's board of directors and take turns leading it on a rotational basis.

For Peggi Williams, a founding member of the organization, Fish is faith-based charity that touches lives in Hale and a half-dozen other nearby communities. And it works because of the church leaders willing to set aside their differences for the greater good of the region.

"They recognized we shouldn't have dividing lines, that we were all the same and that we should all be working together," said Williams, a Pentecostal. "It really doesn't matter who you are. We are one big happy family."

And while area churches, schools, service organizations and public agencies support Fish, those same organizations identify community needs and recommend clients, according to Pat Mothersill, assistant manager of the Fish Thrift Store, the second-hand clothing and household goods store the group operates in Hale.

The store has become an important source of revenue for Hale Area Fish, Mothersill said.

Recalling the bare-bones beginning of Fish, Mothersill tells of local business owners stopping by the Fish store to build a fire in the pot belly stove, warming the store prior to the arrival of volunteers.

"It used to be we would take in \$20 in the store all day," said Mothersill.

The organization now takes in up to \$4,000 a month, according to Williams, but that dollar figure pales compared to the services Fish provides.

From diapers to home heating assistance to pricey auto repairs for those who cannot afford them, Fish is always there when community members are down on their luck.

It is especially important to everyone this time of year, when families with children are struggling to eat and stay warm, let alone splurge for Christmas presents.

"From what we take in, 9712 cents of every dollar goes out to help," Williams said. "It is America's working poor that we have a heart for. They are trying, but you can't pay exorbitant heating bills and still make sure you have gifts under the tree."

The Fish organization began in 1948, in post-war Britain, when religious leaders saw a need for community-based charity, according to Williams.

The name Fish was drawn from the Biblical stories of Jesus feeding multitudes from seven loaves and a few fish.

American soldiers returned home with the idea, and today Fish carries on the traditions as told in Mark 6:41 and Matthew 15:36.

While the organization is nation-wide (Oscoda and the Tawas area each has its own branch), it is locally operated and controlled.

Hale is one of only a few operating its own store.

"The story of Fish is really a story of our community," said Steve Durbin, a Fish volunteer. "The whole community supports us. Individuals and business, community organizations. It is wild, in a good sense. It really is amazing. It is a whole community working together. You don't see that anymore."

Durbin names local grocers, gas stations, hardware and propane companies, telling how a single call can put food on a family's table, provide transportation to a doctor's appointment or repair a broken furnace.

"The businesses take our word that we will pay them, and a phone call is all it takes. It is unreal how many people we help, from little things to huge," Durbin said.

England said his board position came as a welcomed part of his job as leader of Hale United Methodist Church.

"It was expected of me when I was assigned here, that I would help head this thing up," he said. But that's not to say England was anything less than willing.

"Our feeling is, no one needs to go hungry," he said. "No one needs to go without." Just like the Biblical fable.

- Jerry Nunn is a staff writer for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9647 or by e-mail at jnunn@bc-times.com.

Iosco County volunteers pitch in to keep Baby Pantry stocked

Saturday, December 17, 2005

By JERRY NUNN
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

For young families just starting out or for any family just getting by, the narrow gap between going without and having things one truly needs may seem to be a wide-open chasm.

But families in Iosco County need not worry.

Carol Schmidt is there, assuring even the smallest of these family's members don't slip through the cracks.

Schmidt directs the Iosco County Baby Pantry, providing babies and infants with diapers and formula, clothes and food, as well as books and toys. From the third trimester of pregnancy to 4 years old, the organization supplies the area's little tikes with basic necessities.

Schmidt - armed with a community's support and a cadre of volunteers - operates the Baby Pantry at the United Methodist Church in Oscoda the second and fourth Tuesday of every month.

"A lot of these people are working. They just can't make it. Sometimes I sit here and think, 'How does this help?' But it gets them over the hump," Schmidt said.

"The mothers mentor each other and the workers mentor them. And actually they mentor each other," said Schmidt.

Schmidt borrowed the idea from a similar program in Mancelona. Presenting the idea to supervisors at the Iosco County Child Protective Agency where she works as secretary, they in turn offered Schmidt the chance to make it work.

She could not do it alone. While the reaction of her supervisors was less than whole-hearted, Schmidt's proposal tugged at the heart of Doris Eshelman, Schmidt's assistant since the program's inception.

"They gave the two of us \$500 and said, 'Here, knock yourselves out,'" recalls Schmidt. And the pair did.

They also knocked a sizable hole in an unaddressed community need: Young families and single mothers who could use a helping hand but don't qualify for larger governmental or community based assistance.

It is a program that could not operate without Schmidt, according to Mike Peach, Community Resource Coordinator for Iosco County Family Independent Agency.

"For any successful program you have to have that one driving force behind it. There is that one person who provides the impetus and she certainly provides that," said Peach.

Eshelman agrees, and noted Schmidt was the first recipient of Iosco County's "Friend to Children Award."

"Almost anything having to do with kids she is involved in," said Eshelman.

Because of the Baby Pantry's success, the program provides a clearinghouse for agencies aimed at assisting infants and toddlers, according to Peach.

"Everybody in the community who is trying to reach young families uses us as a conduit," said Schmidt.

"I've heard case workers who have said, 'I see more of my families at the Baby Pantry than I do at any other time,' she said.

Peach and Schmidt both admit the program would be lost without its legion of dedicated volunteers and the community's support.

When the program was in its early days, women from area organizations threw Schmidt a "baby shower," providing "gifts" of items her program distributes to area families.

"They bought all kinds of things that we gave to families in need,' said Schmidt.

Agencies donate their excess, local groups give supplies, area organizations donate clothing and blankets, and churches from throughout the county give what they can, according to Schmidt.

And last Christmas a big-hearted business owner wrote Baby Pantry a check for \$2,000, she added.

"I haven't needed to have a major fund-raiser since we started. We have been so blessed by members of this community and the support we receive," said Schmidt

"It makes us feel as if we were meant to be here."

- Jerry Nunn is a staff writer for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9647 or by e-mail at jnunn@bc-times.com.

Warm the Children

Sunday, December 18, 2005

A program sponsored by The Ann Arbor News that uses reader donations to buy winter clothing for needy children. The News pays all administrative costs, so a dollar donated is a dollar for a child.

When: Each autumn.

Amount raised since Nov. 13: \$118,269.35.

To donate: Please send a check to Warm the Children, c/o The Ann Arbor News, P.O. Box 1147, Ann Arbor MI, 48106-1147.

For more information: (734) 994-6733 or www.mlive.com/aanews/warm/.

Social work students apply their knowledge

Providing a hot meal for people in need teaches students some real-life lessons

Monday, December 19, 2005

BY STEPHANIE ARIGANELLO

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Aaron Rankin wasn't quite satisfied with learning theories of social work from his classroom chair. So he offered a suggestion: Provide a hot meal for people in Ypsilanti.

"There are not many hot meal locations in Ypsilanti. I know there are some people in the area who can't travel to Ann Arbor for meals," Rankin said. "We decided to set something up in our own community."

So Rankin and his classmates in Jennifer Kellman-Fritz's policy and practice of social work course at Eastern Michigan University hosted a hot meal Dec. 10 at SOS Community Services. Kellman-Fritz said the people waiting outside before the doors opened for the dinner demonstrated the need for the service.

"We were in here setting up at 2 p.m. and by 2:30 p.m. there was a line of waiting people banging on the doors," Kellman-Fritz said. The event was scheduled to run from 3 to 6 p.m. Rankin, who has worked at homeless shelters in Ann Arbor, was designated the project coordinator but he insisted the title was a very loose one. Different jobs were parceled out to classmates. Those who could not be present to help at the meal took on more responsibilities in the planning and preparation.

"The whole planning process ran relatively smoothly," Rankin said. "Once the classmates started talking about it, we got it done. My classmates had some great connections."

The students called their effort Project Winter Warmth. And as the preparation progressed, the project grew. In addition to obtaining food for the dinner, the students acquired piles of clothing, winter wear and blankets to give to those who stopped by for the meal. Dental kits, nutritional and winter survival information, and ready-to-eat meals also were available.

Bread, chicken pot pie soup and chili were donated by Zoup. The coffee came from Starbucks. Food Gatherers provided the ready-to-eat meals for people to take away with them. Student MaryGrace Fisher, who volunteers with SOS, secured the facility.

"It was a non-issue," she said during the event. "And we've seen a lot of the regulars come through today."

Fisher said that sometimes people look at class projects less-than enthusiastically. However, with this group, she said, that was never a problem.

The class had enough food for 150 people. About 40 people streamed into SOS during the three-hour span. The large piles of bagged clothing, coats and blankets in the front room dwindled quickly. All of the coloring books, crayons and children's items were handed out.

"It was surprising to see how many kids were here," said Jody O'Bryan, the student who helped obtain the Starbucks coffee and baked goods. "It was great to see them singing and dancing around the room."

Though the students did not get as many people as they had prepared for, the efforts of Project Winter Warmth seemed to pay off - not only for the people the class was trying to help, but the students as well.

O'Bryan said even though her emphasis in social work is more in the children and family or nonprofit realm, she learned applicable skills from this experience.

"It was good for me to see how a grassroots effort could work," she said.

Kellman-Fritz agreed the benefits were dual-edged.

"Organizing an event like this shows that what we learn has some value," she said. "It's not just talk. We can do something."

Once the semester is over, Kellman-Fritz said the class would like to remain connected and continue to work on group projects, perhaps expanding Project Winter Warmth into a more regular event.

"This was just amazing," she said. "I just didn't know what to expect. I'm so proud of the students. They were the ones to take action."

Stephanie Ariganello can be reached at sariganello@annarbornews.com or 734-482-2263.

What hard times?

GM, Delphi exceed goals for United Way contributions

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Saturday, December 17, 2005

By Kristin Longley
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FLINT - Financial troubles at two of United Way of Genesee County's largest contributors - Delphi and General Motors corporations - won't likely stop it from reaching its fundraising goal.

United Way Executive Director Ron Butler said Friday that he is cautiously optimistic the organization will meet if not exceed its ambitious \$5-million goal and Delphi and GM employees' generosity is part of the reason.

Both corporations exceeded their initial United Way fundraising goals - Delphi by \$8,000 and GM groups by about \$35,000.

"We've always had tremendous support from Delphi and this year is no different," Butler said.

But the big corporations were not the only ones to ante up. About 20 local groups, including many local school districts, have increased their individual campaigns by at least 50 percent, Butler said.

"We've beaten ourselves up as a community with all these financial problems, but we've always been very generous and giving and that story needs to be told, too," Butler said.

The United Way goal is about \$400,000 less than last year's. This year's campaign is expected to wrap up in the next two weeks, Butler said, and there are many organizations that still are fundraising.

"Just about everyone is a Cinderella story when you look at the potential economic disaster we're facing," he said. "People seem to have more knowledge of and really care about the need in the community."

That is good news for the many agencies that rely on United Way for funding. In the past, the nonprofit has provided grants to agencies to alleviate prescription costs and provide family counseling for people in Genesee County, Butler said.

"Hopefully, these things are changing the outcomes of children and others' lives," he said.

QUICK TAKE

By the numbers
Despite financial problems, two of United Way's largest contributors exceeded their campaign goals.

United Way goal:
\$5 million

Delphi Corp. goal:
\$600,000. Tally:
\$608,000

GM: Final figure not available, but exceeded its goal by about \$35,000
Eight groups increased their United Way campaigns by more than 100 percent.

A difficult year

Saturday, December 17, 2005

By Pat Rombyer

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Donations to the Salvation Army are down this year even though the need for the agency's services is larger, Corps Capt. George Gibbons said.

From the first day the kettles hit the street, Gibbons suspected it was going to be a tough year. The collection on the first day of this year's drive, Nov. 18, was \$3,711, compared to the first day in 2004 when bell ringers collected \$4,735.

"It's slipping away a little bit each day," he said, eyeballing a day-by-day tally sheet. "In a bad economy, we're busier, yet donations fall off."

Donations are down year-to-date by about \$7,000 in a year when demand is high, he said.

"We set the goal at \$135,000, that's a drop from the year before, but we wanted to be realistic," Gibbons said. "We had three (international) disasters hit right in a row."

When the returns from the Salvation Army's annual Christmas mail appeal is tallied in, the shortfall grows larger, Gibbons said.

"Normally, the last six or seven days are pretty good," Gibbons said, anticipating next week's collections.

As of Friday, 15,000 families had registered for Christmas assistance -- food, toys, hats and mittens.

And Virginia Fetterman, director of social services, expects more to filter in next week even though the official sign-up ended Friday.

It doesn't mean the needy will receive less, much of the food and toys distributed are donated.

But, Christmas basket grocery items are supplemented with food purchased by the Army at low-cost from the South Central Food Bank in Battle Creek.

The cost of gasoline is also up, meaning additional costs to transport some of the bell-ringers to the 26 locations around the county.

When service groups and other volunteers are not available to staff the kettles, paid bell ringers are hired for the job. It cost \$80 to have a worker ring the bells.

"We'd rather have volunteers than a paid worker," Gibbons said. "A lot of service clubs step up or a business may take a day."

Other Salvation Armies have experimented using electronic kettles or set up a cut-out figure with a kettle and recorded bell ringing.

"Warm bodies greeting people works the best," Gibbons said. "It's the hardest work in the world, especially those who stand outside on their feet in all kinds of weather."

Published December 18, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Take-a-Kid Shopping puts emphasis on sharing Black Men Inc.'s annual event helps 71 boys buy gifts

By Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

Pushing a shopping cart, Lansing sixth-grader Derrick Foy rushed through Value City to the back aisles displaying household goods.

Thanks to Black Men Inc.'s annual Take-a-Kid Shopping event, he already had selected some jewelry for his mother while at the Delta Township store.

The 11-year-old still wanted a blender or pancake maker for his mom to unwrap Christmas morning.

Advertisement

Able to buy \$30 to \$40 worth of gifts, Derrick appreciated the 43 chaperones who donated time and money to make the shopping spree possible.

A total of 71 boys from Lansing schools took part in the event.

"I can shop," Derrick said. "I can get anything for my family."

"And get thank-yous," said his 10-year-old companion, Nick White, also Christmas shopping.

"And hugs and kisses," Derrick added.

The boys continued shopping while chaperones from Black Men Inc. and several fraternities and sororities began guiding children to the cash registers.

Value City gave the young shoppers a 25 percent discount.

Everyone returned to Otto Middle School for a gift-wrapping session.

Charles Blockett, a local human resources consultant, helped fifth-grader Jamel Brintley, 10, cut and tape festive wrapping paper.

The youngster had purchased toys and games for several siblings.

"I get to buy stuff for my family (and) give them stuff that they'll have all through the year," said Jamel, who also chose a watch for himself.

Black Men Inc. started organizing the annual Christmas event about a decade ago. Participation of both children and chaperones has grown over the years.

"The kids are fun," said Rudy Wilson of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity.

Lansing principals nominate the children, who often come from single-parent or impoverished households.

About 45 children participated last year.

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or svela@lsj.com.

- For more information about Black Men Inc., call 394-0699.

HealthPlus donates blankets to holiday drive

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, December 17, 2005

By Kristin Longley

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HealthPlus of Michigan employees donated almost 40 blankets, including handmade baby blankets, to state Rep. Brenda Clack's third annual "Wrap for Warmth" drive Friday. In addition to the blankets, HealthPlus and its employees have donated almost \$300,000 to more than 100 different organizations and initiatives this year, said Louis A. Hawkins, community relations administrator.

Employees also donated to eight organizations during at least 52 "Jeans Days" this year, where employees must donate in order to wear denim to work, Hawkins said.

The blankets were to be delivered to First Presbyterian Church, 746 S. Saginaw St.

Details: For information on the blanket drive, (877) 737-0034.

Holiday Wish List: What to Do

GENESEE COUNTY
THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, December 18, 2005

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

The Holiday Wish List is a collaborative effort among human service agencies and The Flint Journal, coordinated by the Resource Center. We encourage Journal readers to consider these gift requests so people in need will be remembered at the holidays. Gifts should be new or of the quality that you would be pleased to receive. Small and large donations are equally appreciated - help one family or many.

What to Do

1. Check off the needs you want to meet.
2. Call the agency to get details.
3. Check whether items should be gift-wrapped, and ask where and when to deliver gifts.
4. Deliver your purchases or donations by the deadline.
5. Report your gift to the Resource Center, so the agency can keep its list of needs current: Sybil Atwood, 232-3479, or e-mail satwood@gfn.org
6. To "adopt a family," contact Atwood (phone number and e-mail above) to get connected with an agency that will work with you to provide a family's profile.

On the Net: Resource Center, www.rescen.org, www.volhere.org

Making the connection

Contact Information (all phone numbers area code 810 unless noted):

Adopt-A-Pet: Jody, 629-0723

Alternatives for Children and Families: Gwen Hicks, 235-0633

American Red Cross Genesee-Lapeer Chapter: Susan Shreve, 257-0747

AmeriCorps *VISTA Program: Adia, 232-5736 or Athena, 232-6218

Animals Require Kindness (ARK): Edith, 767-6366

Asthma Task Force: Jan Roberts, 257-9591

Bare Essentials, Urban League: Janice Gooley, 789-7671

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: Angie Murphy, 235-7225

Boys and Girls Club: Bob Nelson, 249-3413

Boys and Girls Club: Bob Nelson, 249-3413

Carman-Ainsworth High School: Nancy Galassini, 591-5509

Catholic Outreach: Danielle Fry, 234-4693

Catholic Charities: Kelly Frick, 232-9950 ext.167

Center for Gerontology: Crystal Burns, 762-4550

Christ Enrichment Center: Debbie or Azell, 239-9425

Citizens for Animal Rescue and Emergency (CARE): Phyllis, 239-3567 Leave message

Disability Network: Linda Friesen, 742-1800 ext. 311

Dress for Success: Janice, 233-4380

DuKette School: Peggy, 785-4743

Faith Access to Community Economic Development (FACED): Lori Herzog, 232-7733
Family Service Agency: Gale or Violet, 767-4014
Flint Family Road: Anita Jackson, 760-9333
Flint/Genesee Job Corps: Verona Terry, 232-1131 ext.113
Flint Head Start: Sheronda, 760-1139 or Jeanelle, 760-5012
Flint Housing Commission: Lakecia Powell, 736-3050 ext. 3135
Genesee County Youth Corporation: Amber Racki, 233-8700
Genesee Valley Indian Association: Barbara Mitchell, 767-0723
Genesys Hospice: Kate Milkman, 636-5013
Girl Scouts Fair Winds Council: Mary Lorah-Hammond, 230-0244
Habitat for Humanity: Norm Goodall, 238-1366
Hamilton Community Health Network: Ann Marie Lesniak, 787-5098
Harvest House Shelter: Clarissa Wiggins, 877-9003
Help One Student To Succeed: Jean Whiting, 760-7217
Humane Society: Stepheni Lazar, 744-0511
Jewish Community Services: Lynda Yeotis, 767-5922
Kids Fighting Cancer-KFC Foundation: Gregory Johnson, 240-4618
King's Closet: Harmony Langford, 234-2187
Last Chance Rescue: Karen, 653-2750
Love, INC: Frank Murdough, 235-4990
Manley Rainbow Learning Programs: Billie McComb, 760-6820
Motherly Intercession, Inc.: Angie, 424-9909
Mt. Morris Mass Transportation Service Center: Lee Bell, 239-7576
Neighborhood House: Debra Smith, 789-2961
New Passages: Lakesha Glover, 233-0922
North End Soup Kitchen: John Manse, 785-6911
Old Newsboys: Laurie Goff, 744-1840
Planned Parenthood: Jennifer Farrington, 238-3631
Project Independence: Brenda Soles or Erin Salzwedel, 744-3600, ext. 175
REACH: Amber Racki, 233-8700
Salem Housing C.D.C.: Natasha Thomas, 785-5340, ext. 25, for games and gifts; Denise Yarbrough, 785-5340, ext. 21, for weatherization materials
Shoes That Fit: Jessica Davis, 760-1190
State of Michigan Department of Human Services, Genesee County Children's District: Mary Smith, 760-2416
Traveling Museum of Afrikan Ancestry and Research Center: Kathryn Williams, 789-7324, museumafrikan@cs.com
Urban League of Flint Bare Essentials: Janice Gooley, 789-7671
Wellness HIV/AIDS Services: Robert Milks, 232-0888
Westwood Heights Elementary School: Michael Bradley, 591-4631
Whaley Children's Center: Tricia Reinhard, 234-3603
Youth Projects: Jessica Davis, 760-1190
YWCA Safehouse: Kim Featherston, 238-7621 ext. 352

Hundreds mourn a life of promise cut short

SVSU student had wedding, health career in sight

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By JESSICA SOULE
Bay City Times NEWS Service

CLARE - The Wymans' Christmas tradition of leaving presents on the doorsteps of needy families will continue even though the Clare family lost a daughter 10 days before the holiday. Larry and Carey Wyman have created a trust fund named Emily's Gift in memory of Emily J. Wyman, a 23-year-old Saginaw Valley State University student who died Thursday of a pulmonary embolism.

The family will use the money to buy toys and gifts for "families who otherwise wouldn't have much of a Christmas," said Larry Wyman.

Workers at Chemical Bank, 807 N. McEwan in Clare, will accept contributions for Emily's Gift. She loved Christmas and used to talk to community leaders to find families she could help, her father said.

"She always rooted for the underdog," Wyman said. "She's been on insulin for her diabetes since she was 2, but that never slowed her down."

Emily Wyman died in the emergency room in MidMichigan Medical Center-Clare after passing out twice at her family's home.

She was enrolled in SVSU's nursing program and was two semesters shy of her bachelor's degree.

The lifelong Clare resident intended to pursue a medical career.

The animal lover first flirted with becoming a veterinarian, then a doctor.

The family received a notice Friday, the day after she died, that Covenant HealthCare in Saginaw was offering her an internship.

Emily Wyman aimed to earn a master's degree and hoped to become a pediatric nurse.

The blue-eyed woman loved children, her father said, and set her sights on having four with her fiancée, Chris McNett of Coleman. The two planned to wed in June 2006.

Emily Wyman, who still lived with her parents, left behind stacks of wedding catalogues and magazines.

"The past couple years, it's been all about the wedding," said Larry Wyman.

The outgoing SVSU junior affected everyone she met, Larry Wyman said.

More than 1,000 people paid their respects during services on Saturday and Sunday, and hundreds sent floral tributes, Larry Wyman said.

"It softened my grief immensely to see that many people. I'm very proud of the number of people she managed to befriend," her father said.

The funeral was set for this morning at Clare United Methodist Church.

Half of Emily's 2001 Clare High School class attended the visitation services, Wyman added.

"She was a pretty special little gal. Everyone who met her was her friend," he said. "She was outstanding."

The blood clot that slipped into her lungs gave no warning to her parents or brother, Nick.

"She was special. Twenty-three years wasn't long enough," Larry Wyman said. "It was pretty sudden. I can imagine there are worse things, but it's hard."



BETTY DERAMUS

Will the real Detroit stand up, show us the way?

There are two Detroit's, one that spits out bullets and one that scoops them up. I'm still wondering which side will win.

There's the Detroit where families with vanishing incomes and hopes struggle to care for ill children — and often fear they're all alone.

And there's the Detroit where Deb Virgiles, owner of the McDonald's restaurant at Woodward and Willis, is teaming up with a radio personality to aid families with ailing children.

Frankie Darcell, of WMXD-FM, 92.3, will host a radiothon from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday. She and Virgiles hope to raise money to offset lodging costs at the 25-room Ronald McDonald House next to Children's Hospital.

The house is a temporary low-cost residence for families of seriously ill or injured children who receive treatment in the Detroit Medical Center.

"I want to take a larger part in making my community vital," says Virgiles, 50, who will reopen a west side McDonald's next month.

Two cities, one falling and one struggling to rise.

Students cook up success

There is the city where Detroit Public Schools are often dismissed as short on excellence and long on troubles.

And there is the Detroit where students from the city's four career and technical centers last week sold first-rate hand-crafted items, including cookbooks with recipes for red velvet cheesecake and 2006 calendars celebrating divas, movie stars and racially diverse Jesuses.

According to Detroit Public Schools spokesman Lekan Oguntoyinbo, these annual sales raise funds for schools and showcase their programs.

"We believe the career technical programs are our best-kept secret," he said. "A lot of people don't know about Breithaupt, which produces kids who become chefs of great restaurants all over the country."

Rosalind Denning, the school system's program associate in career and technical education, agrees.

"Students from Breithaupt, they put spices together and sold them as gift packages," she said. "Some (other) students, with the help of teachers from Golightly, made a cookbook."

Commitment is needed

Meanwhile, food merchandising students from Randolph sold crabmeat soup until it ran out, and Crockett students sold silk-screened T-shirts, Tootsie Roll trees and hand-painted and monogrammed jewelry boxes.

Some students even peddled gift certificates for oil changes and car winterization, Denning said.

Two cities.

There is the Detroit where crumbling houses and trash-choked lots threaten many well-kept blocks.

And there is the Detroit where the Motor City Blight Busters will give a free restored house to a needy family during halftime Dec. 26 at the Motor City Bowl game in Ford Field.

Two towns. Two levels of commitment. And two possible futures.

Betty DeRamus' column runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Metro. Reach her at (313) 222-2296 or bderamus@detnews.com